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ENTERED AT THE POST OFFICE AT NEW YORK, N. Y., AT SECOND CLASS MAIL RATES.

Vol. XXXIII.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y., November 24, 1886.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

No. 422



THE MAN BEFORE HIM NOW RAISED HIS LEFT ARM UNTIL HIS FINGER POINTED STRAIGHT AT THE MURDERER.

OR,
**To Duty Bound—
To Vengeance Sworn.**

A Romance of the Southland.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "CIBUTA JOHN, THE PRICKLY
PEAR," "DISCO DAN, THE DAISY
DUDE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE DETECTIVE'S OATH.

THE time was sunset, and the place was one of the fairest spots in all Kentucky.

From a range of mountain-like hills, there stretched away to the north, south and west mile beyond mile of rich and fertile blue-grass land—the pride of the State, dotted here and there with farm-houses and their adjacent barns and other out-buildings.

Through this country a beautiful river wound

its way, and could be seen for a long distance in two directions, seeming not unlike a gigantic serpent of silvery hue, on a river of molten silver, in fact, so white and calm it lay.

Not far from the foot of the hills, at a point where the river made one of its longest bends, nestled a charming little town.

Through this town lay a broad highway road, hard and smooth, which crossed the river a mile or so above; and there was also another road, a narrow and crooked one, which led away across the hills.

Here the scream of the "iron horse" had not then been heard.

We have said that the time was sunset, and the place—one of the fairest spots in all Kentucky.

That spot we will now describe.

It was about a mile and a half distant from the town, up on the hillside, and a few steps aside from the narrow and crooked road.

There several of the larger of the hillside trees were clustered, sturdy old oaks of full a century's growth, and beneath their shade was a sparkling spring.

These trees and the spring were upon what we may properly term a small plateau, which jutted out boldly from the sloping hill and commanded the view we have portrayed.

The spring bubbled up in a rocky basin, around which grew the softest of moss and the finest and greenest of grass.

Here, at the hour of sunset on a summer day—the day of which we write, reposed a traveler, a man, quietly enjoying a good cigar and gazing out upon the landscape below.

He was a young man, not more than twenty-eight years of age; was about the medium height, as one might judge; well-built, and evidently strong of arm and limb. His complexion was dark, and his hair and eyes were black, as was his graceful mustache. His face was not, strictly speaking, a handsome one, but it was open, manly and fearless in its expression.

He was clad in a suit of neatly-fitting clothes of some serviceable material, and wore a pair of broad and easy shoes which had the appearance of having been made especially for long-distance walking.

His hat—a black soft felt, was on the grass beside him, and he was lying upon his side with his back toward the spring, his head supported by his right hand, forearm and elbow, while his left arm lay idly across his body.

The day had been a hot one, the man had walked quite a distance, and, although he had been resting here for an hour or more, he was yet loth to leave so cool, refreshing and enchanting a bower.

This young man was one Burton Rosewell, a Government detective.

Young as he was, Burton Rosewell was considered one of the best and ablest officers in the service. He had won great honors, and was widely known as "Blue-Grass" Burt, the "Gold Star Detective," and those honors had been won in Kentucky, not a hundred miles from where we now find him.

In truth, he was a Kentuckian born, and hence his appellation of "Blue-Grass" Burt.

As to his title—the "Gold Star Detective," that came from the fact of his having received for one of his great achievements a medal of gold—a badge in the form of a star, one side of which bore the usual words of the detective's badge of authority, while upon the other it was inscribed as a reward of merit.

It was a handsome and costly medal, for, besides being of a fine quality of gold, it held in its center a diamond of the first water.

Of this medal—or badge, and of the title it had brought him, Burton Rosewell was justly proud.

On this occasion, however, the gold star was not to be seen in its usual place upon his breast; in truth, the detective was traveling *incognito*.

Not far from where he was reposing, lay an artist's knapsack, on one corner of which were the words—"Walter Prince, New York."

Burton Rosewell was assuming the character of an artist, and "Walter Prince" was the name under which he was traveling.

Presently the young man threw away his cigar, which was nearly consumed, and rose to his feet.

"So," he mused, as he advanced to the edge of the plateau and looked out and down upon the town, "yon town is Braddsbury—the place whence Amos Norman was last heard from."

"Poor Amos! a braver man and truer friend ne'er lived."

And as the young detective stood and gazed sorrowfully upon the fair scene before him, his eyes became half-dimmed with welling tears.

Amos Norman had been a Government detective, and one who had never known fear.

He had done excellent service in the South, and had made his name both known and feared.

He was older in years than Blue-Grass Burt, but a strong friendship had sprung up between the two men—a friendship that grew day by day until they had become like brothers.

Several months previously to the time of which we write, Amos Norman had been sent South to take charge of a case which had baffled the skill of another detective for some time.

This case was—to discover, unearth and bring to account, a band of "moonshiners," a band which for some time had laughed the Government to scorn, and whose illicit product was actually flooding the market.

Only two reports from the detective had been returned. One from a town in western West Virginia, and the other from the little town of Braddsbury.

Since the last report, not a line had been received at headquarters, and the authorities becoming greatly troubled, had now sent Blue-Grass Burt to find the missing man or learn his fate.

This explanation given, we will now proceed. For some minutes Blue-Grass Burt stood gazing upon the town below him, buried deep in thought.

Presently he roused up.

"Poor Amos! I wonder what has been his fate?" his thoughts ran. "Brave, noble, and generous to a fault, almost, I loved him as a brother. Can it be that he is dead? Has he been murdered by these outlaws whom he was sent to bring to account or disperse? I fear it must be so. Else, why his long silence?"

"Well do I remember the dangers he and I have faced together, and well do I remember that once he saved my life."

"And the risk he ran to do it!"

"Ah! that was a noble act. He had no thought of his own danger, and escaped death only by a hair's breadth."

"Yes, to Amos Norman do I owe it that I am alive to-day, and coward and knave would I be if I were to prove false to him now."

"Had I known that he was missing, I would have been here weeks ago; but I did not learn of it until I was ordered here to look for him."

"Yes, coward and knave would I be, and unworthy to bear the name of MAN."

"Heaven forbid! And here I swear it!—that I will devote my life to the task before me! If Amos Norman be alive, I will find him; if he be dead, then will I avenge his death; and woe to the man who has done him harm!"

And the speaker stood with uncovered head, his left hand upon his breast and his right extended upward, and with the last rays of the setting sun falling full upon him—such was the detective's oath.

CHAPTER II.

A LOST STAR.

BLUE-GRASS BURT remained where he stood for a few moments longer, and then turned again to the spring.

"I must move on," he said, half-aloud, as he picked up his hat, "or I shall not reach the town before dark."

Putting on his hat, he next picked up his knapsack and adjusted it upon his shoulders, and this done, he grasped a stout cane which was leaning against the trunk of one of the trees where he had left it, and stepped out to the road.

Just as he reached the road a voice fell upon his ear, and he paused to listen. It was that of a woman, singing, and never, the detective thought, had he heard a sweeter voice.

For the first moment he was at loss to find whence the voice came, but he soon decided. It was further up the hill, and the singer evidently was coming down the road toward the town.

The woman evidently had just commenced singing, for she was not a great distance away, and the detective had not heard her before.

She could not be seen, owing to the crookedness of the road and the thick undergrowth.

The song was an old and familiar one, and while the young detective paused and listened he debated in his mind whether he should go on, or remain where he was until the singer came up.

Before he could decide the singing suddenly ceased, and then came a piercing scream; instantly followed by the cry—"Help! help!"

Burt was greatly startled, but, dropping his cane, he unsling his knapsack, and running swiftly soon rounded a bend in the road to behold, a few yards away, a beautiful girl, struggling to free herself from the grasp of a tramp.

"Release that lady!" the detective cried, as he dashed forward.

At the words the tramp released his hold and prepared to defend himself.

The instant Burt came face to face with the ruffian, he exclaimed:

"What do you mean, you scoundrel, by laying your hands upon this lady? Be off with you, or it will be the worse for you!"

The tramp, however, did not stir.

"An' who be you? Be you the owner o' th' land heurabouts?" he demanded, insolently.

"Take yourself off, I say, and be quick about it, too!"

"An' what if I don't? Come, now; what if I don't?"

The detective's answer was a quick blow direct at the tramp's face, but only to strike the empty air; for the fellow dodged with a quickness that proved him to be no stranger to that sort of warfare; at which the detective, knowing what to expect, "ducked" just in time to escape a powerful return blow.

Then the alert young man, before the tramp could recover, got in a blow with his ready left hand that sent the vagabond to the ground.

But he was up in an instant, and then he rushed upon his adversary to bear him to the ground by force of might.

Blue-Grass Burt was ready for him, however, and met him more than half-way; they gripped in a close embrace, and the struggle became desperate.

But it was of short duration, and when the two fell to the ground the tramp was underneath, with the detective's knee upon his breast and his fingers at his throat.

The whole affair, from first to last, had not occupied more than a single minute.

"Do you say 'nuff'?" the detective demanded, as he pressed his knuckles hard against the rascal's neck.

"Y-yes," the vagabond gasped; "I—I—'nuff! 'nuff! I cave, I do, an' I'll lope right off."

"Then get up and 'dust.'" And Burt allowed the man to rise.

"You're a terror, you be!" the tramp said, as he "pulled himself together," so to say, and rubbed his throat where the detective's fingers had fairly blistered the skin. "You're a rip-roarer! I thought I was some on th' fight myself, I did; but I'm nowhere. I'm goin', stranger—so, good-by," and he turned to go, as the young man warned:

"If I ever see you in this neighborhood again, you dog, I'll shoot you!" giving the fellow a glimpse of a revolver.

"Oh! I'm off, stranger, I'm off!" the tramp declared as he hastened away; "you'll never see me more. I'm no fool." And he was soon lost to sight.

As yet Blue-Grass Burt had but glanced at the fair girl whom he had rescued, and who stood behind him with clasped hands and blanched face. He now turned to her and said:

"I am happy, miss, to have been of service to you, and if you will allow me to do so, I shall be proud to accompany you to your destination."

The rose-color now suffused the girl's cheeks, and she replied:

"And I am thankful, sir, that you happened to be near. That brute sprung out upon me from those bushes, scaring me almost to death, and before I could turn to see he had me in his grasp. How can I ever repay my debt of gratitude to you?"

"By simply granting my request."

"To escort me the remainder of my way?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am going home—to the town at the foot of the hill, sir, and if you intended going there, you may walk with me. If not, though, if you were going in another direction, then I cannot allow you to go out of your way on my account."

"Fortune favors me," the detective rejoined. "I, too, am going to the town. I had been resting under the delightful shade beside a spring a short distance from here, and had just started on, when suddenly your voice fell upon my ear and I stopped to listen."

"You have a remarkably sweet voice—yes, I mean it!—and I was sorry to be deprived of the pleasure of listening to you when you paused so abruptly, but almost at the same instant I heard you scream, and then your cries for help, and I came to your assistance. But, let us be going."

"Indeed, yes! for it will soon be night."

They started on, and when they came to the spring the young detective paused.

"Here are my trappings," he said, as he picked up his cane and knapsack.

"You are an artist?" the girl queried.

"No, not an artist yet, but I am an art student, and I am traveling partly for pleasure and partly to make sketches. My name is Walter Prince, and I am from New York."

"Walter—that is a pretty name; I like it," the girl remarked. Then she added, hesitantly:

"My name is Ettie Winton."

"Ettie Winton, eh? Ettie is a sweet name—you paid a compliment to my name, you know—I like it very much. It is almost as sweet as your voice."

"You do not lack for compliments, I find, like all city-bred men."

"Not where compliments are deserved, most assuredly."

The homeward walk neither of them ever forgot. They talked all the way, and time flew as on magic wings. The distance seemed all too short, and shorter still seemed the time consumed.

When they reached the town it was growing quite dark, and the lamps were being lighted; and when they parted—he to proceed to the hotel and she to her home, it was with a warm pressure of hands, and with wishes that they might—and unspoken resolutions on both sides that they would—meet again.

An hour later, when the moon—which was just rising above the hills when the lovers parted—had climbed the heavens high enough to shed its light upon the winding road at the point where the detective had had the struggle with the tramp, its beams were reflected by a glittering diamond—a diamond that lay in the middle of the dusty road, and which was set in the center of a golden star.

CHAPTER III.

ETTIE WINTON'S VOW.

In all Kentucky there was not a more charming girl than Ettie Winton.

About nineteen years of age, she was beautiful in face and form, and the belle of the town—of all the country for miles and miles around, in fact; the life of every ball and social gathering; the petted favorite; but she was not happy. Her young life was clouded.

Her mother died when she was but a year-old babe, and two years later her father—Abel Winton—married again.

About a year after that another child was born to him, when the little affection the step-mother had ever had for little Ettie, disappeared at once and forever.

Ettie's earliest recollections were of neglect and cruel treatment.

Other children were born, and Ettie was obliged to serve them all. While they were at play she was at work. If aught went wrong, she had to bear the blame. If punishment was inflicted, it was always she who received it. If she complained to her father, he—in order to escape his wife's ugly moods—would show no sympathy, and then the moment his back was turned, the vixen step-mother would chastise the girl again for having complained.

Jane Winton's only reason for such partiality and injustice was, had she admitted the truth, jealousy. Ettie Winton was pretty and gentle; her step-mother's children were coarse and ill-mannered. Ettie was quick, bright and witty; her step-mother's children were dull and uninteresting.

In short, Ettie Winton had inherited the beauty and goodness of her own dear mother, while her half-sisters—the children were all girls—inherited the quarrelsome nature of the second wife.

Ettie's only hours of respite and contentment had been her hours at school. There she had received justice, at least, and there her sunny nature had shone forth unreservedly. She took a wonderful interest in her studies, and made such progress that she carried off every honor to be attained—a fact which gave her step-mother new cause for jealousy, if not of actual hatred.

The only real happiness she had ever known, though, was during a year she had spent at a boarding-school in a distant town, whither her father had, against the second wife's protest, sent her.

There, surrounded by congenial companions, she had been her natural self, and developed into a lovely young womanhood.

After her return from that school, at the age of seventeen, Ettie's life had been much the same as before, except that now she understood her rights more fully, and was the better able to maintain them; and she was far from happy.

Her eldest half-sister, Mary, now about fifteen, was away at school in a distant city, where she expected to remain for three years, and the family at home consisted of her father, her step-mother, three half-sisters aged thirteen, eleven and nine, and herself.

When Ettie turned toward her home, after dismissing her agreeable escort, Burton Rosewell, she felt for the first time in her young life the exquisite sensation—the delightful intoxication—of love.

Her heart beat wildly; her breath came quick and short; she seemed to be walking upon the very air, and for the moment all her sorrows were forgotten.

"Walter Prince—Walter Prince," she kept repeating half aloud. "I like his name. And he is an artist. Really, his name seems to proclaim it—it is so appropriate, it seems to me. Perhaps I have heard of him before—but no, that cannot be, for I would certainly remember it. And, how brave and strong he is! At first I feared that horrid tramp would defeat him, but he found his master. And how very pleasant he is, too! and what a fine conversationalist! I like him—yes, I do like him, and I wonder whether I shall meet him again. But, of course I shall—I will. He expects to remain here for several weeks, he said, and— But, here I am, at home."

At that same time, thoughts not greatly unlike her own were passing in the mind of Burton Rosewell.

Having reached her father's house, Ettie opened the gate and entered the yard, and a moment later went into the house.

Her father was not there, but her step-mother and younger half-sister were, and the moment she entered the door Jane Winton turned upon her and cried:

"Pray, my lady grand, and where have you been until this hour?"

"I have been nowhere except where I set out to go—over the hill to Farmer Nelson's, to visit his sick daughter. The day has been so warm that I thought I would wait until near night before starting home, and that is why I am late."

"Poor Kate Nelson is very ill indeed mother"—so Ettie had always called her step-mother, "and I am afraid she will never get well."

"Let her die, then," the step-mother snapped. "Is she any better than I am? If you would take a little more interest in my health and my affairs, you would be doing something worth

your while. Here I am, tied down to the house like a nigger and a slave, working the life and soul out of me, while you can go gadding away over the hill to see a sick neighbor. What—"

"But, mother—"

"Don't you 'but' me, I won't have it! What thanks do I get, I want to know, for all that I have done for you? I have worked and slaved for you ever since I first set eyes upon you, and what are my thanks? Haven't I given you a good education—better than any one of my own children is likely to get? and what are my thanks? Didn't I work myself almost to death for a whole year, that you might go to boarding-school? And now here you go off for a whole day and leave me to do every stroke of the work myself. That is a specimen of the thanks I get!"

"But, mother, I had not been out before in over a week, and—"

"And are you any better to stay in the house than I am? Come, now, my lady fine, answer me that! Do I not need to go out as well as you? and do I ever get out? Have I not done enough for you, already, that you go off for a whole day and leave me here all alone?"

"You were not all alone, though, mother. I am sure Rose and Sarah are old enough to do a little work once in a while, and they were here."

"And is it not enough, you ingrate, that I must work for you, that you want my children to do the same? It is shameful! Do you imagine for a moment that I would allow my children to do a stroke of work while you are out enjoying yourself? If you do you are mistaken, that is all."

"No, I do not imagine anything of the kind, mother; I know that you prefer to have me at work while they enjoy themselves. It has always been so."

"You ingrate! I—"

"Perhaps I am, but I have never been able to realize that I am."

"I shall tell your father of all this the instant he sets foot into the house."

At that moment Abel Winton's footsteps were heard, and Mrs. Winton dropped into a chair, flung her apron over her head, and began to sob violently.

When Abel entered he cast a look at his wife and then at his daughter, and exclaimed harshly:

"At it again, are you? It is strange that you and your mother cannot live together in peace. What is the trouble now?"

"It would try the patience of a saint to live beneath one roof with her!" Jane Winton cried. "Here she has been out all day, while I have been on the go until my arms and feet are ready to drop off; and now she is not even willing to—"

But here, with a heart-rending wail, she buried her face in her apron again and sobbed even more violently than before.

"It is false!" Ettie exclaimed, her face aflame with indignation. "I am willing to do all that I should do—and more. I—"

"Abel Winton!" the irate step-mother screamed, springing to her feet, "do you allow a child of yours to tell you to your face that your wife is a liar?"

"No, Jane; certainly not. I—"

"Then why do you allow it? Hasn't she just as good as done it? Is her word to go ahead of mine? I will have you to understand for once and for all that I am no liar, and I tell you she has been out!"

"I do not deny that I have been out since ten o'clock this morning, father," Ettie acknowledged; "but I do deny that I have been asked to do anything which I am unwilling to do. I have been over the hill to Farmer Nelson's, to visit his daughter Kate, who is very sick. I wanted Rose and Sarah to go in my stead, but they would not go because it was so warm; and I—"

"Yes," the step-mother interrupted, "she had the impudence to ask Rose and Sarah to go tramping over the hill in the broiling sun, with a big basket of dainties, while she could stay here in the cool of the house; and when I would not allow them to go—although they had the good sense to refuse, anyhow—then she set out herself."

"Yes," Ettie agreed, "I set out myself; and when I found how warm it was, I thought I would wait until near night before starting back. That is why I am late."

"Well, well," said Abel, "let the matter drop, and—"

"Yes," cried Jane, "let it drop, and uphold her in everything! Is it not enough that she has called your wife a liar, Abel Winton? But, this is always the way. I am the one at fault, I am the ingrate, the liar; I— Oh! boo-hoo—oo—" And again dropping onto a chair, and flinging her apron over her face, that angelic woman rocked herself to and fro, and wept copiously—or tried to.

"No, Jane, you are not at fault," Abel declared, "but for Heaven's sake try and get along a little longer. There'll soon be a change."

"As for you," turning upon Ettie, "I want you to do a little more as your mother wants you to, and live in peace with her. Do you understand? And now, pay attention, for I've got something important to say to you:

"When did you last see Morris Norton?"

"When did I last see Morris Norton?"

"That is what I asked you."

"I have not seen him for several days."

"Then you did not see him to-day?"

"No, sir."

"Well, next time you see him he will have something to say to you, and I want you to answer him yes. Do you understand?"

Ettie's face turned deathly pale.

"He will have something to say to me, and you want me to answer yes. What do you mean, father?"

"I mean just this: He will ask you to marry him, and I want you to do it. Do you understand now?"

Ettie recoiled a step involuntarily.

"Marry Morris Norton?" she gasped. "I— Surely, father, you do not mean it."

"I mean it, girl, as sure as there is a heaven above us!"

Jane Winton now sat bolt upright on her chair, her apron down, and her face a very picture of surprise. No tears were to be seen, by the way, after such violent weeping, nor were there signs of any. She was, too, for once in her life, speechless.

Morris Norton was a man who had once before tried to win Ettie Winton's hand, but whom her father had then ordered from his house.

That was only a year ago, or a little more, and now to find Abel Winton counseling—even commanding what he had before opposed and forbidden, was startling.

As for Ettie, she sat down all pale and trembling, and could only gaze at her father in surprise.

"Do you understand me?" Abel thundered.

"Yes, father," she gasped, "I understand you, but—"

"Then bear in mind what I have said, and do as I bid you."

"But, father—"

"There, there! not a word! You understand my wish, and I expect you to obey me."

"But—"

"Not a word, I say! I—"

"Father, you shall hear me!" and Ettie sprung to her feet with flashing eyes. "I do not love Morris Norton—I do not even respect him; and marry him—I never will!"

"Furies! do you tell me to my face that you will not obey me—your father?" and Abel brought his fist down upon the table with a force that made the windows rattle.

"Forgive me, father," and the fair girl bowed her head, while hot tears fell from her eyes; "in all other things I will obey you, but—"

"You shall obey me in this!" the father cried. "It is my wish that you marry Morris Norton, and by heavens you shall!"

"Father, I never will!"

"Go to your room!" Abel commanded, fiercely. "No child of mine shall disobey me, as you shall learn!"

Ettie left the room, weeping, and went to her own room, where she threw herself upon her bed and cried as though her heart would break.

For an hour or more she cried, bathing her pillow in tears; but at last she fell asleep, and then she dreamed that Morris Norton, in the form of a hideous dragon, was about to devour her, while "Walter Prince," like a valiant St. George, was rushing to the rescue.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GOLD STAR FOUND.

WHEN Blue-Grass Burt started on, after leaving his fair companion to continue her way alone, at her request, his thoughts, as we have said, were not unlike Ettie's.

They were very similar to hers, in fact.

He was in love, and what was more—he knew that he was; and what was more still—he meant to win Ettie Winton if he could.

When he reached the hotel to which Ettie had directed him—which by the way was the only one in the town, and was called the "Open Door"—he went at once into the bar-room.

Some ten or a dozen men were seated around, all types of the Kentuckian of the whisky-loving and tobacco-chewing order. They naturally turned their attention to the stranger.

Blue-Grass Burt advanced straight to the bar, and inquired:

"Can you give me supper and lodging, sir, and board for a few weeks?"

"Wal, stranger," the proprietor replied, with a drawl, "I reckon."

"All right, then," said Burt, as he unsling his artist's knapsack and laid down his cane; "just trot out your register and I'll quill my name."

"All right, stranger, all right," the landlord responded, as he produced his book—that book so familiar in every hotel in the land that one loses sight of the fact that it is required to be kept by law; "heer you are, sab." And he wheeled the volume around in front of his customer, and handed him pen and ink.

Burt took the pen, and wrote:

"Walter Prince, artist,
New York."

"There," he said, as he in turn wheeled the book around to face the landlord, "that's my

name, sir, my business, and where I'm from. Am I too late for supper?"

"Wal, you are a leetle late for th' reg'lar feed, stranger, but we can soon get up a snack for ye, I reckon."

"Please do so."

"First, though, give me a little liquor."

"Come, gentlemen," turning to the men present, "won't you take something?"

Instantly the ten or a dozen stalwart forms rose, some ten or a dozen quids of tobacco—like-wise stalwart—were thrown into convenient corners, and some ten or a dozen voices responded:

"Stranger, I don't keer 'f I do," and every man in the room was soon ranged at the bar.

Whisky was called for by all, and all drank to the artist's health, prosperity, and long life in a brimming glass.

Burt responded, paid the score, and then asked to be shown to his room.

The landlord, lighting a candle, conducted him to a cool and pleasant chamber; then came down and gave orders for the supper, or "snack."

Returning to the bar-room, he said:

"Wal, boys, what d'ye think o' him?"

"He's a gentleman, every inch!" was the general decision.

"You're right he is, and he seems to have slathers of wealth, too."

"What's his name?"

"Walter Prince. He's an artist, and comes from New York."

"One o' them fellers what paints pictures, eh?"

"Yes."

"Wal, no matter what his callin' is, boys, he's a gentleman, every inch."

Blue-Grass Burt had made a good first impression at Braddsbury, as it had been his intention to do.

The supper ready, the landlord called his guest down, and Burt did full justice to the bounteous "snack."

Having finished, he again repaired to the bar-room—which was the gentlemen's sitting and reading room also—he sat down, lighted a cigar, and, picking up a paper that lay upon a table near at hand, began to glance over its columns.

This paper happened to be the "Braddsbury Weekly News," issued that day, and barely had he opened it when his eyes fell upon an item which riveted his attention instantly.

It ran as follows:

"The skeleton of a man found on the hills a few days ago by our worthy citizen Morris Norton, has been positively identified as being all that remains of Charles Carnsworth, the fire-insurance agent who disappeared so suddenly some months ago. Mr. Carnsworth, it will be remembered, came here about six months ago and opened a fire-insurance office on Main street. He did a good business from the very start, and many of our citizens insured heavily in the company he represented. When he disappeared the *News* took steps at once to ascertain whether or not he had been what he had represented himself to be, and we learned that all the policies he had issued were genuine, and were acknowledged by the company. It now comes to light that Charles Carnsworth was not only a fire-insurance agent, but also a detective in Government employ. This was discovered through finding his badge attached to the inner side of his vest. Full information has been sent to Washington, and it is believed that a force of officers will be ordered here immediately. It is to be hoped that the murderer will soon be discovered, and the mystery cleared up."

While the Gold Star Detective was reading, it was only by the greatest effort that he could conceal the emotions stirring within his breast.

Conceal them he did, however, for not a muscle of his face moved, nor did its expression change a particle from what it had been when he first picked the paper up.

Here, at the very outset of his search, was news of Amos Norman, and news the most horrible!

He had been foully murdered!

For some time Blue-Grass Burt sat in silence, glancing over other portions of the paper, but without reading a word. His mind was busy.

"Poor Amos," he reflected, "cruelly and foully murdered, and his bones left to whiten in storm and sunshine. Too bad, too bad! But my oath is taken, and he *shall* be avenged! I must write at once to headquarters and let the officials know that I am here, and what I have learned. I will ask them to send five officers here at once, in uniform, ostensibly to investigate this case, but really to draw attention from me so that I can work the better. These men will confine their search to the bar-room, principally, and in no case must they be seen in conversation with me. I will arrange some plan to communicate with them secretly. In the first place, though, I must make the acquaintance of this Morris Norton, and I must pay an early visit to the spot where poor Amos was killed."

At that moment a heavy step sounded on the porch, and a man entered the bar-room. He was about thirty-five years of age, fully six feet tall, was plainly dressed, but had an air about him that seemed to proclaim him well-to-do. He was large in proportion to his height, and was evidently of great physical strength. He was passably good-looking, and wore a heavy mustache.

"Good-evening, boys," he called out, as he entered, and he glanced around.

He seemed to take in everything in that one glance, and when he saw the stranger present he nodded to him shortly, as though to signify that his "good-evening" included him, too; and without having stopped at all, crossed the room to the bar.

"Good-evenin', Morris Norton," said the landlord, affably. "What's your pleasure?"

"A little whisky," was the reply.

The landlord put down a bottle and a glass, and the man, pouring the glass full to the brim, dashed it off without a wink.

Then he crossed over and took a seat near Blue-Grass Burt.

"Fine evening, stranger," he remarked, as he picked up the paper which Burt had just laid down.

"It is indeed," Burt responded.

"Been reading about the murder?"

"Yes. It is a mysterious case. Are you the Morris Norton who found the body?"

"How do you come to know my name?" Norton demanded instantly.

"Why," Burt answered, "I just heard the landlord address you by that name."

"Oh! Yes, stranger, I'm the man that found him."

"It must have been a startling discovery."

"It was, stranger, you can bet."

"Is any one suspected of the crime?"

"Not a soul, sir, far as I know."

"Well, I suppose the mystery will be cleared up sooner or later. I see by the paper that officers are expected here from Washington to investigate the matter."

Morris Norton smiled.

"They may as well stay away," he remarked.

"What the sheriff and the constables of this county can't find out, it is of no use for strangers to try to."

"By the by, stranger, where d'ye hail from?"

"I'm from New York," Burt replied. "My name is Walter Prince, and I am an amateur artist. I'm traveling around a little this summer, partly for pleasure and partly for profit. Have a cigar?" and he proffered one as he spoke.

"Thank'e. Don't care 'f I do," and Norton accepted and lighted it. "A pretty good weed, I'll swear," he added.

Thus they talked for an hour or more, about things in general but nothing in particular.

Blue-Grass Burt asked few if any questions. He was simply free, easy and natural, playing to perfection the part he was assuming.

One thing he had remarked since the entrance of Morris Norton, and that was—when the conversation had been free and general before, it had suddenly become subdued.

Was Morris Norton a man whom his fellow-citizens feared?

Blue-Grass Burt was just thinking about retiring to his room, having a letter to write before going to bed, when a new-comer entered, and Morris Norton leaned across the table and whispered:

"That's Colonel Emmerly Cass, stranger; a worthless bummer, but a character every inch," and turning to the new-comer, Norton called out:

"Colonel, good-evening! Glad to see you looking so well. Won't you—"

"Ah!" the colonel interrupted, "is that you, Morris? Good-evenin'. Yes, I don't keer 'f I do!" and he turned toward the bar.

"I was about to say— Won't you take a seat?" Norton concluded.

The colonel's jaw dropped perceptibly, but he took the joke good-naturedly, and returned:

"And as I said, Morris, I don't keer 'f I do," and he sat down.

"Well, colonel," the landlord inquired, "how wags the world with you?"

"Bully!" the colonel exclaimed. "This morning I was as poor as—as poor as I well could be; to-night I'm as rich as Crassus," and thrusting his thumbs into the armholes of his vest he leaned back and spread out his hands as though he were "monarch of all he surveyed."

"And why the change?" asked Norton. "Has your daughter relented?"

"Nary a relent! In truth, Morris, I fear Priscilla Cass is past relenting."

"I fear she is, colonel."

"I wish you'd marry that gal, Morris."

"No, colonel, I thank you. But, tell us how you became so suddenly rich."

"Well, ye see, it war like this: I went over th' hills this afternoon to see Priscilla, thinkin' perhaps she *might* relent to the extent of a dollar or so, but 'twas no use. She gave me a whoppin' big dinner, however, and *such* a dinner! Morris, if you only know'd how that gal kin cook—"

"That's all right, colonel, but I'm not marrying; not at present at any rate. Go on with your story."

"Well, as I was sayin', she gave me a whoppin' big dinner, and then she made me stay till th' sun went down before she'd 'low me to start back to town. I stayed, and when I started th' sun had been down for some time, and th' moon war j-st comin' up."

"Well, by th' time I was to th' top o' th' hill, th' moon was gettin' up purty high, and when I

started down this side it was almost as light as day. As I was trampin' along, thinkin' of th' hard-heartedness of the world in general and of Priscilla Cass in particular, somethin' as bright as a spark of fire suddenly caught my eye. It was layin' right in th' middle of th' road. Naturally, I paused, thinkin' it might be a di'ming; and gentlemen, a di'ming it was, sure enough!"

"A diamond!" cried Morris Norton, disdainfully. "You never saw a diamond in your life!"

"*Didn't I?*" the colonel retorted. "Perhaps you can tell me what it is, then," and as he spoke he threw open his vest, disclosing to the astonished gaze of all a golden star, in the center of which blazed a diamond unmistakable.

It was Blue-Grass Burt's badge!

CHAPTER V.

A SWEEPING CHALLENGE.

To say that Blue-Grass Burt was surprised, on finding his gold star in the possession of another, is to express but poorly his state of mind. He was astounded.

Instantly he recalled his adventure with the tramp, and knew that the badge must have fallen out of his pocket during the struggle.

There was no mystery about it, and he blamed himself for not having taken better care of it.

Great as was his surprise, though, no sign of it was visible. He simply looked on coolly, and apparently disinterestedly.

"What the deuce have you got there, colonel?" Morris Norton demanded, as he rose up and stepped forward.

"Do it look like a di'ming?"

"By heavens! it is a diamond! and the star is of gold; it— By the gods of war, colonel, it's a detective's badge! Take it off and let me see it."

The colonel complied, and Morris Norton held the badge up to the light and read aloud the words it bore.

While he was doing so, Blue-Grass Burt glanced around from face to face to note how the news—for news it was—was received.

He saw nothing, however, to draw his attention to any one in particular.

When Morris Norton was done, he asked:

"And do you know who this Burton Rosewell is? I'll tell you who he is, then: He is Blue-Grass Burt!"

"Blue-Grass Burt!" cried the colonel. "That's th' feller that played thunder with th' moonshine in this State a couple of years ago, ain't he?"

"Yes, he's the same man, and it is said that he is a terror. I guess he has never been in this county before. I never heard of it, if he has."

"An' this star was given to him as a sort o' reward o' merit, eh?"

"That's what it says."

"I s'pose, then, he'll be likely to come 'round lookin' for it, won't he?"

"The chances are that he will. I suppose, though, he is here in disguise."

"By the by, stranger," and Norton turned suddenly to the detective, "did you ever hear tell of this Blue-Grass Burt before?"

"Can't say that I ever did," Burt answered promptly.

If Morris Norton had a suspicion that "Walter Prince" was not what he seemed, he would have to resort to sharper tricks than that to prove it.

No sudden question could throw Blue-Grass Burt off his guard.

By constant practice he had gained complete mastery over himself, and had the ghost of his grandfather appeared before him, the chances are that he would not have changed countenance.

"Well, colonel," and Norton turned again to Colonel Cass, "what are you going to do with this thing?"

"Wal, I hardly know. Ye think this Blue-Grass Burt will be 'round a-lookin' for it, do ye?"

"Oh! yes, he certainly will."

"Then I guess I'll sell out. If you've got a Vee-dollar bill that you don't want very bad, just turn it over to me and th' star and di'ming is yours."

"Will you sell it for five dollars?"

"That's what I'm tryin' to do. When Mr. Blue-Grass Burt comes around a-lookin' for it, I don't want it in my possession, that's sure; so if you think it's worth th' money, why fork over."

"Why don't you put it up at bid? Maybe some one present will give more than five dollars," and Norton half turned toward the detective as he spoke.

"Oh! if I can get five for it I'm satisfied," the colonel declared.

"Maybe the stranger here would like to bid?" Norton suggested.

"Would ye?" the colonel queried.

"No, I guess not," Burt replied. "If I won the thing I wouldn't know what new use to make of it, and besides, I wouldn't care to have

it in my possession, under the circumstances, anyhow."

"Well, then," said Norton, "if no one else wants it, I'll take it. Here's your five dollars, colonel."

"The star is yours, my dear Morris, and thanks to ye," said the colonel, as he clutched the money, turning instantly to the bar.

"Landlord, a drink, quick!" he ordered.

Bottle and glass were put before him, and he filled and drank three glassfuls, almost without taking breath.

"Ah! my heart and soul!" he then exclaimed, "that is good. It makes a new man of me. It sends th' blood of youth coursing through my veins, and causes my old heart to beat as it beat in th' days of yore."

"You may not believe it, stranger," addressing Blue-Grass Burt, "but at this moment I am supremely happy. My heart is full—likewise am I—and I rejoice much."

"Here's your change, colonel," the landlord interrupted.

"Never mind th' change, Tom, never mind th' change," the colonel directed; "it'll soon be yours, anyhow, so just lay it aside and keep count of what I indulge in."

"Fact is, stranger," again turning to Burt, "if I kin get royally drunk on that five dollars, I'm goin' to do it. I'm never so supremely happy as I'm when I'm drunk. Then all my sorrows leave me, and I even forget th' hard-heartedness of my daughter Priscilla."

A wink from Morris Norton at this point apprised the detective that something was coming.

"I think you've heard me mention Priscilla already, haven't ye, stranger?"

Burt nodded.

"I thought so. Well, she—Priscilla Cass—is my daughter. I'm Colonel Emmerly Cass, at your service. I'm an old vet, I am, and I served through th' hull war."

"Yes, Priscilla is my daughter, stranger, though it grieves me to say that she has got so that she seldom relents."

"I used to be worth quite considerable o' money at one time, and so did my brother Jim. After my wife died, though, I fell into th' way o' drinkin', and in less'n a couple o' years I was n't worth a dollar."

"That didn't trouble me, though. My brother Jim still had his wealth, and his health was failin' fast, so I nat'rally expected to soon come in for that. Consequently I was reckless."

"When Jim died I gave him a bang-up funeral, takin' th' money right out of his own pocketbook to do it. Ye see, Jim had lost his wife, same's me, and he hadn't a child in th' world, and as I was th' next o' kin, of course I could 'ford to send him off well."

"Well, after we'd planted him all in good shape we all went back to th' house, post-haste, to hear th' will read; and when it was read, thunder and lightnin'! what d'ye s'pose Jim had gone and done? Why, he'd gone and left everything, clip and clean, to my Priscilla!"

"It was enough to make a mule weep."

"And Priscilla, what d'ye s'pose she done? Well, she jest picked right up and moved over to Jim's farm, and dast me if she ain't been a-runnin' th' place ever since."

"At first she used to relent to'rds me—her father—th' author of her bein'—quite lib'rally; but she soon found that th' oftener she relented th' oftener I applied, and she kind o' shut down on me. Of late she hasn't relented to th' extent of a dime in six months."

"With this explanation, stranger, you will be able to understand th' remarks that were exchanged between Mr. Norton and me when I first came in."

"A mighty fine gal, though, is my Priscilla, stranger; and why it is that Morris Norton will not marry her, is more—"

"There—there, colonel, that will do," Norton interrupted. "I tell you I am not marrying at present, and when I do— Well, I've got my eye on a piece of calico that suits me to a T."

"You mean Abel Winton's gal, I s'pose. Well, go ahead, Morris; it's no funeral o' mine, but I think I can see where you make your mistake."

"Landlord, another drink!"

The landlord set out the bottle and glass again, and again did the colonel drink heartily, exclaiming when he had done:

"My heart and soul! but that is good."

"At the mention of Abel Winton's name, Blue-Grass Burt was all attention. Was he the father of Ettie? and did these remarks refer to her? If so, he saw in the person of Morris Norton a dangerous rival."

While the colonel was talking, the gold-star badge had been passed from hand to hand, every one present being anxious to see it.

It was now returned to Morris Norton.

"By th' by, Morris," the colonel inquired, "what be you goin' to do with that thing?"

"What am I going to do with it?" Norton repeated, as he proceeded to pin the badge on the inner side of his vest, "I'm going to wear it; I'm going to wear it right here, colonel; and I here and now proclaim an open challenge to Blue-Grass Burt—or any other man—to take it away from me!"

The man then closed and buttoned his vest, and went out.

CHAPTER VI.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

THE interests of our story demand that we now go back to the time of the finding of the remains of Amos Norman, *alias* "Charles Carnsworth," by Morris Norton.

It was a stormy day, the wind was blowing a gale and the rain was falling in torrents—a most inauspicious time for any one to be out upon the hills; and yet there were two men of the town of Braddsbury abroad.

One of these was Morris Norton.

He, however, having been out of town all night, was returning at an early hour of the forenoon. He was hastening along by an unfrequented path, which was the nearest way between Braddsbury and a little hamlet some miles away, and just as he reached one of the most dark and dismal points through which the pathway led, he came to a sudden stop.

For a moment he stood, as though undecided in regard to something, then he started on again, but only to advance a few steps, when he once more stopped abruptly, thought for a moment, and retracing his steps to the point where he had first paused, he turned aside from the path and made his way through the bushes to his right.

For a short distance he proceeded, until he came to a little glade, where he halted, for in that glade lay the form of a man.

Stepping forward to where it lay, Morris Norton touched it with his foot.

It was but the form of a man at most. It was a skeleton.

For a few moments Norton gazed upon it, then glanced around at the ground.

Presently, with an exclamation of surprise, he sprang forward and picked something up. It was a gold watch-chain, and one which he recognized instantly by its odd-shaped links. He knew it to be the property of Abel Winton.

Barely had he picked the chain up when he heard some one approaching, and ere he could turn away from the spot, if such had been his intention, another man appeared upon the scene.

That man was Abel Winton!

"My God!" he gasped, stopping short, his face as pale as death, "Morris Norton, you here!"

"Yes, murderer!" Morris Norton answered, in a severe tone, "I am here!" and the two stood and glared at each other like tigers at bay.

Winton was the first to speak.

"Morris Norton," he said, "I am no murderer."

"Can you prove that you are not?"

"Can you prove that I am?"

"I can."

"How can you prove it?"

"A moment ago I entered this glade, and here I discovered this skeleton. I was horrified. I was still more horrified, though, when I beheld this watch-chain lying near." And as he spoke he held the chain up to view.

"Do you know whose chain it is, Abel?" he demanded.

"Yes," Abel answered, huskily, "it is mine."

"Of course it is. Almost every man, woman and child in Braddsbury would recognize it at sight."

"Abel, I found this chain lying there. How it came there is for you to explain. When I first beheld this skele on I said to myself: 'Murder has been done here,' and when my eyes fell upon the chain, I added: 'and here is a clew to the murderer!'"

"My God!" Winton gasped, "it is as I feared it would be—I am suspected of this crime!" and he fairly staggered back against a tree for support.

"Then you knew something about it before, eh?"

"Yes, I did."

"It looks so, certainly."

"Morris Norton, do you believe that I murdered that man?"

"It is hard to believe it, Abel, but the circumstances are certainly against you."

"They are, I know; and yet I swear to you that I did not kill this man."

"Then who did?"

"That I do not know. If I did, I would never allow suspicion to stop at my door, that is certain."

"This is a grave affair, Abel Winton."

"I fully realize that."

"And you claim you are innocent of the crime?"

"Before God—yes."

"Can you prove your innocence?"

"No, I cannot. If you disclose what you know, Morris, I shall be arrested; and if I am arrested I shall certainly be hanged. Every circumstance is against me."

"You are right. In the first place, I find the remains of the victim, and near by a watch-chain belonging to you. Barely do I make these discoveries when you appear, and your first words are— 'My God! Morris Norton, you here!' showing that you were coming directly to this spot, and that you were surprised to find me here."

"Your startled manner, your pale face, your trumbling limbs, all proclaim your guilt."

"Abel Winton, my evidence will hang you as sure as fate, whether you are guilty or not."

"It is true, true. It is just as I have feared it would be. But, Morris Norton, by my Heavenly Father I swear to you that I did not kill Charles Carnsworth!"

"Ha! you even know whose body it is! Worse and worse."

"Yes, Morris I know that this is the body of the missing insurance agent—Charles Carnsworth. More than that, I was here by his side when he died."

"And still you proclaim that you are innocent."

"I do."

"How, then, came your watch-chain to be lost here? And, why did you not make known this matter, if you are innocent? Every circumstance is against you."

"True, true. But, listen, Norton, and I will lay all the facts bare before you, just as they are."

"On the morning on which Charles Carnsworth was last seen at Braddsbury, I was returning to town from Brown's farm, when, as I reached the point opposite to this little opening, I fancied I heard a groan. I stopped and listened, and then heard it again. It came from this direction, and making my way through the bushes to this spot, I found, to my horror, Charles Carnsworth lying here senseless, with a knife buried to the hilt in his back."

"Not knowing what to do, but wanting to do something to save his life if possible, I acted upon the first thought that came to me. I sprang forward, drew the knife from his back, and endeavored to stop the flow of blood."

"The moment the knife was out of the wound the man began to come to, and in a moment more he sprang to his feet and cried:

"'Ha! murderer, we will die together! And then he threw himself upon me."

"All weak and wounded as that man was, Morris, I had to fight in defense of my life."

"And you finally killed him in self-defense?"

"No, I did not. Loss of blood soon overcame him, and he fell to the ground dying."

"Then I told him that I was not his murderer, but had heard him groan and come to his help. Then he recognized me and believed me."

"I believe you," he gasped. And he added:

"'Whoever my slayer is, let him beware! I have not many friends on earth, but I have some, and there is one among them who will devote his life to avenge my death. On him I can count, and woe to the man whom he shall call to a settlement for this deed.'

"And that friend," I asked, "who is he? Tell me, and I will give him your dying words."

"That friend," he answered, "the best, the truest friend I ever had, is—Blue-Grass Burt, the Gold Star Detective."

"And that was all. The blood gushed from his mouth, and in a minute more he was dead."

"Then the horror of my situation rushed upon me. Suppose some one should come that way and find me there, all covered with blood, and the body of Charles Carnsworth lying at my feet. I would be taken for his slayer, and no power on earth would save me from the gallows."

"Excited, frightened, almost beside myself, I dashed away through the woods like a madman. And in the woods I remained all day, trying to think of some plan by which I could rid myself of the blood-stained clothes I wore. In this, kind fortune favored me. When night came on I started toward town, and before I was out of the woods I stumbled upon a polecat. Then it was positively necessary for me to change my clothes before I could enter my house."

"Waiting until a late hour I went home, called to my wife, explained my predicament, and directed her to throw a change of clothing out the window to me. Receiving the clothes, I retired to the barn to make the change. Then, having taken everything out of the pockets, I took the blood-stained garments—hat, boots and everything—and burned them."

"Next morning I missed my watch-chain. Where could it be? Was it here, a silent accuser that I had killed this man? or had I lost it elsewhere in the woods? From that hour to this, Morris, I have known no peace of mind. An innocent man was I, yet as much in danger as though I were a murderer in fact."

"Many times I have set out to come here to search for my chain, but fear of being seen has always turned me back; and thus it has been day after day and week after week, until today. And now, even in this driving storm when I thought it least likely that I should meet any one, I find you here."

"What I have told you, Morris Norton, is the truth. And now I ask: Do you believe me, or do you not?"

"Abel Winton, strange as your story is, I believe you."

"Thank God!"

"But," Morris Norton continued, "how will twelve jurymen, sworn to render a verdict strictly in accordance with the evidence produced, accept such an explanation? You have acted the part of a murderer to perfection."

"Alas! I realize it only too well."

"On that fatal morning if you had gone

straight to the town, all blood-stained as you were, and told your story, men would have believed you; but go there to-day and tell the same story, and they will laugh in your face."

"It is true—true."

"And you are a doomed man."

Abel Winton's head fell upon his breast, and he groaned aloud.

"Yes, Abel Winton," Norton repeated, "you are doomed indeed, unless—"

"Unless what?" and the tortured man looked up instantly.

"Unless I choose to save you."

"Good heavens! I had not thought of that? I am almost incapable of thinking. True, you are the only one who knows my secret, and—"

"And if I keep your secret, you are safe!"

"Morris Norton," and Abel Winton spoke with perfect calmness now, "you have heard my story, and you say that you believe me. Keep my secret, and all that I possess in this world shall be yours."

"Abel Winton, I will keep your secret on one condition."

"Name it."

"About a year ago I asked you for your daughter's hand in marriage. You refused, and even ordered me from your place. I now ask you for her hand again. Give me Etta Winton, and you are safe. Refuse, and—"

"Say no more. Ettie Winton shall become your wife. I will speak to her, within a few days at most, and if she will not marry you willingly, then I will force her to do so."

"Very well, it is a bargain. As soon as your daughter becomes my wife, Abel, I will return your chain to you. And I give you three months in which to fulfill your agreement."

"It shall be done."

"Very well. And now you had better be off. Mind, not a word about our meeting, and you are safe."

"I understand."

And so they parted, Winton going off through the woods, and Norton going straight to the town.

An hour later, and all Braddsbury was in a state of excitement over the news of the finding of the body of the missing insurance agent, and when the coroner went to view the scene of the murder, half the town went with him. And then it was that, by the shrewd suggestions of Morris Norton, facts were brought to light which proved Charles Carnsworth to have been, in reality, one Amos Norman, a Government detective.

CHAPTER VII.

A TATTERED STRANGER.

WHEN Morris Norton left the Open Door Hotel, after his sweeping challenge, he set out at once in the direction of Abel Winton's house.

"So," he muttered, as he strode along, "this Burton Rosewell, or Blue-Grass Burt, is already in this neighborhood, eh? I wonder where he can be? and in what disguise? I must see Winton at once, and put him on his guard. Can it be that that artist chap at the hotel is a detective? No, I reason not. I had a suspicion in that direction at first, but I guess it was groundless. He is too young a man; and besides, it is clear to be seen that there is no disguise about him."

This last was true. Blue-Grass Burt was wearing no disguise whatever, except his assumed character as artist. He had used so many disguises, however, and had been seen so rarely in *propria persona*, that this was about the best "disguise" he could have had.

"No," Morris Norton continued, "it is in some other character that Blue-Grass Burt is working, and we must find him out. If I did not want Abel Winton's girl, I would drop the whole business and let them make out of it what they could; but I do want Ettie Winton, and, what is more, I am bound to have her!"

"Ah! but it was a fortunate discovery that gave me such a hold upon Abel Winton."

Before Norton reached his destination, he met Abel Winton going in the opposite direction.

"Where are you going, Abel?" he inquired.

"I was going down to the Open Door," was the reply. "I wanted to find you."

"You wanted to find me, eh?"

"Yes."

"What do you want?"

"It's about the girl."

"Ettie?"

"Yes. But say, can't we go some place where we can have a little private talk?"

"Certainly we can. Let's walk up as far as the bridge and back again. That will answer the purpose."

"All right; come on."

And they started.

The bridge in question, it will be remembered, was where the turnpike led across the river—about a mile above the town.

"Well," Morris Norton presently questioned, "what about the girl?"

"Why, just this," Abel responded. "If you marry her at all, Morris, it will have to be by force."

"Then you've put the question to her, eh?"

"I have."

"And what does she say?"

"She declares that she will never marry you."

"Oh, well, we shall see about that. If she won't marry me of her own will, then she must be made to obey *yours*. I'll stand no fooling."

"Of course not. The only thing you can do at present, though, is to make yourself as agreeable to her as you can, and when the time comes round I'll see to it that you get her."

"All right. If you don't— But, you understand me, Abel Winton."

"Yes; only too well."

"And now, Abel, I've got some startling news for you."

"Startling news for me! What is it?"

"First, Abel, tell me again who it was that Charles Carnsworth said would avenge his death? Do you still remember?"

"Do I still remember! Morris, that dying man's words will ring in my ears as long as I live!"

"Well, what was the name?"

"It was 'Blue-Grass Burt, the Gold Star Detective.'"

"So I thought you said, but I wanted to be certain. Now, the news I have for you is—Blue-Grass Burt is now in this neighborhood."

"How do you know it?"

"By this!" and Norton threw open his vest and displayed the gold star. "This is the Gold Star Detective's badge."

"Thunder! How did you get hold of it?"

"Old Cass found it, to-night, on the hill—on the old road, not far from the spring."

"How in the world came it there?"

"Give it up. There is a mystery back of it all."

"Well, it is a mystery."

"And what I wanted to see you for, Abel, is this: You must be on your guard. By the finding of this star we are forewarned that Blue-Grass Burt is here, in some guise or other, and forewarned is forearmed. You must be on the lookout for danger every moment, night and day. You must not trust anybody. And more than all—you must beware of strangers."

"You are right, and I'm glad you've warned me. Innocent though I am, I must act the part of a guilty wretch."

"You are right."

"And you—you are my friend only on condition that—"

"That you fulfill your compact. Fail in that, and I will denounce you as surely as there are stars above us. Fail not, and your secret is safe forever."

"But, good heavens! is there to be no release in case we find it impossible to force the girl to marry you against her will? Will you still denounce me, even though I have done everything in my power to serve you?"

"I will. You *must* carry out your bargain, and to the letter. There is absolutely no release— Yes, there is one, but that—"

"Name it."

"It is the unlikely event of your daughter's death. If she dies, then you are released."

"She shall be yours."

"Enough is said. And now it is war to the death with this infernal detective. You have your very life at stake, and I am fighting to win the fairest girl in all Kentucky. Our interests are identical; for if your secret is discovered, then I lose all. If I do not win, then your life shall pay the forfeit."

Abel Winton groaned aloud.

Presently Morris Norton came to a sudden stop, and exclaimed:

"Thunder! why did I not think of it before?"

And then he added:

"Come, let us go up where old Cass found this star. We may find something more, something that has escaped the old bummer's eye. The moon is light enough for us to see what tracks are in the road, anyhow."

The two men turned, but instead of retracing their steps they cut across the fields to strike the old road at the foot of the hill.

On reaching the road, however, they found it impossible to distinguish one track from another. A team and wagon had passed that way lately, and all previously-made tracks were covered.

"Just the luck!" Morris Norton exclaimed. "Come on, though, for now that we have come this far we may as well see it out."

"Yes, I reckon you're right," Abel agreed; and so they went on up the hill.

When they reached and passed the hillside spring, then they began to scan the ground more carefully.

It was the same as below. The team and wagon had bolted out the tracks of all who had passed previously.

Suddenly, however, Abel Winton stopped and said:

"See here, here is something."

It was where Blue-Grass Burt had had the wrestle with the tramp.

"Where—what?" asked Norton, who was a step behind.

"Right here; here, too; and there. There's been a tussle of some sort here, Morris, twixt man and man."

"You're right. And that accounts for the

lost badge. Blue-Grass Burt has had a scrimmage of some sort with somebody, right here."

Owing to shadows cast by the trees, the moon was not shining as fully upon that part of the old road now as it had been when Colonel Emmery Cass had passed by that way, but there was plenty of light to enable the searchers to make out that a struggle of some sort had taken place there, and they endeavored to make further discoveries still.

But their search was useless. They penetrated the bushes for some distance, thinking it possible that one or the other of the combatants had been killed and the body dragged out of sight, but no further information was gained.

"Well, I guess that's all there is to it," Abel Winton finally remarked.

"Yes, it seems so," Norton agreed, "and I guess we may as well go back to town."

"You're right. The less secret work we do, the better, I think."

"That's where your head is level. Come on."

They turned to go, when just at that moment a man came in sight around a bend in the road a little further up the hill, and called to them.

"Friends," he called out, "may I have a word with you?"

Morris Norton and Abel Winton wheeled around, both of them considerably startled.

They saw at a glance that the man was a stranger to them. He was young, twenty-five years of age, perhaps, and wore a full beard—which, by the way, was red, as was his hair. The beard was parted at the chin, and the hair was closely cropped, as could be plainly seen, as he wore no hat.

Not only was the stranger minus a hat, but his coat was badly torn, one sleeve being ripped almost out, and his vest was almost buttonless. Added to these silent witnesses to his distress, there was a great tear in his trousers across one knee.

On the whole, he was certainly in a sad condition.

At the very first glance, Norton and Winton gave each other a significant look.

"Well, stranger," Norton answered, "I reckon on you can. What can we do for you?"

"Fact is," the young man explained, as he came up, "I've lost my way. I want to get to Braddsbury."

Now that he was face to face with them, the two men could see that the stranger was—or recently had been—decidedly well-dressed. His shirt-bosom was of spotless white, the cloth of his suit was of a fine quality, he wore a high collar, a pair of cuffs, kid gloves, and carried a cane; and, more impressing than all, a single eye-glass dangled from a silken cord around his neck.

"Want to go to Braddsbury, eh?" Norton repeated. "Well, we're going right there, stranger, so you can come right along with us."

"Thank you. I'm glad I met you. I have been having a terrible time."

"Your appearance don't belie your statement, stranger."

"No, I suppose not. I fell in with an over-friendly dog about an hour ago, gentlemen, and— But, you can see for yourselves."

"Are you sure it was a dog?" Abel Winton asked, giving Norton a very sly nudge.

"Am I sure it was a dog? Well, if it wasn't a dog it must have been a tiger, that's all."

"Where d'ye come from, stranger?" asked Norton.

"From Philadelphia, sir. My name is Alphonso St. Eric. I have just received my diploma as a M. D., and am now looking for a place to locate. Being fond of travel, I have drifted away out here, and hearing that Braddsbury is a growing town, thought I would pay it a visit. There you have me, sir, all in a nutshell."

All the way to the town the conversation ran in a general vein, Abel Winton and Morris Norton taking care to avoid home matters, and St. Eric, of course, knowing nothing about the recent events at Braddsbury.

On reaching the town the stranger was shown to the Open Door Hotel, and Abel Winton and Morris Norton parted, both believing that this was one of the men who had the fight on the hillside. They agreed that the "dog" story was "too thin."

CHAPTER VIII.

MORRIS NORTON SUSPECTS.

ALPHONSO ST. ERIC was just what he claimed to be, and had told the truth in explaining the cause of his sorry appearance.

He might have added, however, that he was a specimen of the genus "dude," and that he endeavored to ape all that was "English."

So wretched was his condition when he came upon Morris Norton and Abel Winton, though, he laid aside for the time the affected drawl peculiar to his ilk.

When he entered the Open Door Hotel, Colonel Emmery Cass was just ending a song.

The colonel was by this time a little more than half full, and was happy in proportion.

"Hullo! by th' glory o' th' full round moon!"

he exclaimed, "if here don't come sunshine in the night!" And as he spoke he pointed to St. Eric's red hair and beard.

"Sirrah!" Alphonso cried, drawing himself up proudly, "what do you mean?"

"I don't mean anything I didn't say, sir, I can assure you. When you first opened th' door I thought it was the risin' sun a-comin'. I see now that it's your head. Beg pardon, I'm sure. Come up and take somethin'."

A roar of laughter followed this, and Alphonso's face turned as red as his hair and beard.

"Sirrah!" he cried again, "I'd have you know I did not come here to be insulted! I—I—I've a mind to pull your nose for you, I have, by Jove!"

"Oh! pray don't. Come and take a drink instead."

"I never drink." And then the young M. D. advanced to speak to the landlord.

"Don't drink, eh?" the colonel went on. "Well if ye don't, ye don't, I s'pose; but you're the first red— But, good heavens! what ails yer coat? What is th' trouble with yer vest? What is th' matter with yer pants? Where is yer hat? Young man, see here: you've been foolin' around my daughter!"

Here followed a perfect howl of laughter.

"Sir-r-rah!" and Alphonso wheeled around, purple with rage, "what did you say?"

"I say you've been a-foolin' round my daughter."

"This is infamous! I know nothing about your daughter. Didn't know you had one."

"Ha, ha, ha! You can't fool me, young man! You've had a scrimmage with Stonewall Jackson. I've been there myself. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Your remarks are incomprehensible to me, sir. If you refer to my present unsightly appearance, let me inform you that I owe it to being attacked by a dog."

"Ha, ha, ha! Of course you do. I knowed it, stranger, sure. And that dog's name is Stonewall Jackson. Oh! you can't fool me, nary time! You've been foolin' round my Priscilla, and I know it."

"Are you crazy, or drunk?" demanded the young man, almost beside himself.

"Neither one," promptly. "I ain't crazy, that's certain; and I ain't more'n half-drunk. Oh! I know what I'm talkin' about, you bet."

"You may, but I doubt whether anybody else does."

"Oh, yes they does, don't ye, boys? Don't this feller's appearance sort o' indicate that he's been pokin' his nose round my daughter's house?"

Three or four present agreed that the colonel was right.

Alphonso St. Eric was wild. He felt as though he would like to pull the noses of everybody present. He did not attempt it, though.

"What did I tell ye?" the colonel demanded. "Didn't I say ye couldn't fool me? You might jest as well own right up, stranger, first as last."

Light began to dawn upon the stranger's mind now.

"I think I see," he said. "It is your daughter who lives in the white farm-house just over the hill."

"Right you be, stranger. I knowed you'd been there; I could see it in your eye."

"Well, if that is where your daughter lives, my dear sir, I have been there. Allow me to explain. I set out to come here on foot, following careful directions given me, but I lost my way, or thought I had, and turned in to that white farm house to ask directions."

"I passed down the lane all right, but the moment I opened the gate out sprung a dog, and I thought he would eat me up."

"Ha, ha, ha!" the colonel laughed, "that was Stonewall Jackson, every time. Ye didn't go no further; I reckon, stranger?"

"No; I concluded that I wanted to go right back the way I had come."

"Ha, ha, ha! I should reckon. And could ye make Stonewall understand it that way?"

"No, sir, I could not. He seemed to be quite as unwilling to allow me to retreat as he was averse to letting me advance. He was more in favor of eating me up."

"Wal, stranger, you're lucky that ye got off as whole as ye have. I tell ye Stonewall Jackson is a terror."

"He certainly is. I had to fight most desperately to get away from him. Even as it is I lost my grip-sack and umbrella, and the last I saw of them that dog was snatching them around the yard regardlessly."

"Do you think, sir, there is any chance of my recovering them?"

"Oh! yes, certainly," the colonel assured. "Priscilla Cass is th' very soul of honor, sir, seldom as it is that she relents; and every fragment of your property that can be found, sir, will be laid away until called for."

"In that case," said Alphonso, solemnly, "they will be laid away forever. I shall never call for them."

"Then, sir," the colonel declared, "I shall call for them for you. If my daughter Priscilla is th' soul of honor, sir, I am none th' less her father. It is a family trait, sir."

"My name, sir, is Colonel Emmery Cass. I'm an old veteran. I served through th' hull war,

and came out with scars and honors. Priscilla Cass, as I have said, stranger, is my daughter, and the soul of honor; though it pains me to add that now she seldom relents."

"I used to be worth a neat little fortune at one time, stranger, and so did my brother Jim. When my good wife died, though, I took it so much to heart that it drove me to drink, and in less'n two years every dollar was gone."

"That didn't worry me a great deal, however, except for th' immediate inconvenience, for my brother Jim still had his wealth, and as he was a-droopin' away to'rd th' grave pretty fast, I nat'rally expected to come in fer that."

"Wal, when Jim died, stranger, I jest set to and gave him a bang-up funeral, takin' th' money right out of his own funds to do it, too. Ye see, he had lost his better-half, too, same as I had, and as he hadn't chick nor child in th' world, and as I was th' nearest o' kin, of course I looked upon everything as mine. I could afford to send him off well, ye see."

"After th' funeral we all went back to th' house to hear th' will read, and when it was read— Well, ye could a' knocked me down with a straw. What d'ye s'pose Jim had done? I'll tell ye. He'd left everything to my Priscilla."

"I wept—salt, sad tears. It was enough to make a statue weep."

"As for Priscilla—what d'ye s'pose she went and done? I'll tell ye that, too. She jest picked up her goods and chattels and moved over th' hill to Jim's farm, and there she's been ever since, runnin' th' place as good as Jim ever did. Yes, sir, stranger, there she lives, all alone—No, not quite alone, either, fer Beriah Simms and his wife Jane Ann live on th' place; but of course they play second fiddle to her lead."

"And Stonewall Jackson—he's her right bower, you bet! At first, after she came into her fortune, she used to relent to'rd me quite liberally; but she soon made th' discovery that th' oftener she relented th' oftener she might, and so she shut down on me. When she shut down, then, sir, I began to assert my rights. I visited the place at night and carried off whatever I could sell. I had to have rum, and to get rum I had to have money; hence—and so forth."

"Well, that plan worked all right for a time, but one night when I went there I unexpectedly made th' acquaintance of Stonewall Jackson, and—well, I haven't played th' marauder since."

"With this explanation, stranger, you will understand how it was that I guessed where you had been, th' moment you entered here, and appreciate th' remarks I made. If they were made with undue levity, I beg your pardon."

"Priscilla Cass is an uncommonly fine gal, stranger, worth her farm and several thousand dollars besides; and if you're anyways inclined towards matrimony, give her a call."

"Landlord, I'll repeat the dose."

The landlord set out bottle and glass, and the colonel indulged freely.

"Won't you take some, stranger?" he again asked Alphonso. "There should be a fellow-feeling between us now," he added, "since we both know Stonewall Jackson."

"No," Alphonso answered, "I thank you Colonel Cass, but I never drink."

"Sorry for ye, indeed," the colonel declared. "You'll never get acclimated here till you do." And then he added:

"Will anybody else come up and—"

He did not finish. Up rose the citizens present to a man, and took their places at the bar.

When the excitement was over Alphonso St. Eric addressed the landlord.

"Landlord," he said, "my appearance is against me, but I want to engage a room and board for a few days or a week, at least. Can you accommodate me?"

"Wal, stranger," the landlord drawled, "I reckon."

"I am not without funds, sir," Alphonso explained.

"All right, stranger, all right. Jest put yer name heur on th' register." And as he spoke he swung the book around, and set out pen and ink.

St. Eric wrote his name, and then was just on the point of pushing the book back across the bar when his eye fell upon the name just above his own, and he exclaimed:

"Walter Prince!"

At that moment Blue-Grass Burt entered the room, he having retired to his own room shortly after Morris Norton had gone out. Since then he had been busily engaged writing letters, and his light giving out before he was through, he had now come down to get another.

"My dear Mr. Prince," Alphonso cried, "how do you do? It—aw—it gives me pleasure to meet you again. It does, really, I assure you."

Forgetting for the instant his sad appearance, he spoke with his usual affected drawl.

Burt took his hand and responded:

"Glad to see you again, my dear, sir; but, what on earth have you been doing?"

St. Eric explained, and then it came out that the two had met two days previously, and had journeyed together to their last stopping-place, where they lost sight of each other.

While they were talking, or when they were about done, rather, who should enter but Morris Norton.

"Ah-ha!" he thought, "what game is this? They're detectives, or I am much mistaken."

An hour later and all had retired, and the Open Door was closed for the night.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIRST MOVE.

BLUE-GRASS BURT's first duty next morning was to post his letters.

Inquiring where the post-office was, he soon found it, and then before dropping his own letters into the box, he inquired whether there were any for him.

There was one, addressed to his assumed name, and he opened it eagerly.

It was a communication from headquarters, informing him of the facts he already knew in regard to the finding of the remains of Amos Norman, and instructing him to report immediately.

One of his letters he had not sealed, and to that one he added a postscript in pencil, acknowledging receipt of the letter.

Sealing the letter then, he dropped it with the others into the box.

Returning to the hotel, Burt made some inquiries as to where he could get a bright boy to accompany him to the hills. He thought it would be a fine day for him to make a sketch.

Let us mention right here that Burton Rosewell was an artist of no mean order. It was his natural gift, and he had, with patient practice, developed it to a wonderful degree.

A boy was soon found in the person of the landlord's son, a boy about fifteen. He was a smart lad, and knew the country for miles around.

Burt engaged him, and together they set out, the boy acting the part of guide.

Far from being really interested in the pursuit of art that day, Blue-Grass Burt's real object was to visit the place where the remains of Amos Norman had been found.

He soon turned the boy's mind in that direction.

"Well, my little man," he presently remarked, "where are you going to guide me to?"

"Don't know, mister. 'I'll take ye anywhere ye want to go."

"What I want," Burt explained, "is to find some spot that will make a nice picture. Some lonely dell in the woods, where there are big trees and deep shadows, with the sun just looking in at the top and lighting up a bank of rich moss or ferns. Can you find such a place?"

"Oh! yes, lots of 'em."

"That shady plateau where the spring is," Burt continued, "is a beautiful spot, but I will keep that for some other day. Now, where is the nicest place you know of? We don't want to go too far to-day, though."

"Well, I don't hardly know which is th' nicest place," answered the boy, as he reflected. "I kin tell ye, mister, it won't be easy to beat th' spring, th' place you jest spoke about."

"No, I suppose not. As I said, though, I want to keep that for some other day. I'm nct particular where we go, my lad; take me to any place. Mind, though, we don't want to find any dead men, like I was reading about in the paper last night. I—"

"Say!" the boy suddenly interrupted, "wouldn't ye like to go to th' place where that man was found? That's a fine shady place."

"You think I can make a sketch there, do you?"

"Well, it's 'bout th' nicest spot I kin think of, not countin' th' spring."

"Well, we'll go there."

"All right."

Just before reaching the point where the path turned to the hillside spring, another path was noticed on the other side of the old road.

Into that path the boy turned, and led the way through the thick bushes.

Half an hour's walk brought them to the fatal place.

"Here's where we turn in," the boy said, stopping.

Burt glanced around.

Just a few steps ahead stood a tree that was a great deal larger than any of its immediate neighbors, and the thought came to the detective that behind that tree the assassin had stood, and had sprung out upon his victim as he was passing.

"So, this is where poor Amos met his death," he thought.

"Well," he said, aloud, "this is certainly a dismal-looking place, my boy. It is a fit place for a dark crime."

"That's what everybody says."

"And what do the people of the town think about the murder?"

"They think it was an awful thing."

"Yes, I know; but do they have any idea how it was done?"

"Some seem to think th' murderer must 'a' stood behind that big tree, and that he hit Mr. Carnsworth with a club when he came along. Somebody found a heavy stick cut there in th'

bushes, that looked as if it might 'a' been used for such work."

"Found a club, eh? Well, it looks as though that theory were the correct one. But, let us go on to the place where the man was found."

The boy led the way again, and in a moment more they reached the spot.

"There," he said, pointing to the spot, "is where they found him."

"Where 'they' found him?" the detective repeated, quick to note the boy's use of the plural; "I thought he was found by *one* man."

"Yes, so he was. That was a slip o' th' tongue."

"And what was the man's name? I forget it."

"Morris Norton."

"What sort of fellow is he? But, let's get to work at our sketch, and then we can talk while we work." And with a look at the place where his friend had lain, the detective arranged his easel and tablet.

Burt's object was, to draw out of the boy all he could, without letting him suspect that he was interested in the matter to any extent. Accordingly, he made it seem that the sketch was of first importance.

Having placed his easel and stool, he sat down and began to prepare his colors.

The sketch he was about to make was of the spot where the murdered man had been found, which was now plainly marked by a darker and heavier growth of grass and moss, in the midst of which the form—or the impress of the form—of the man was plainly marked; and of the trees in the background.

When all was ready, and he began to daub the initial or priming color upon his paper, he said:

"What were we talking about?"

"You had jest axed me what sort o' feller Morris Norton is."

"Morris Norton? I— Oh! yes. He is the man who found the body here. Well, what is he like?"

"Why, he is a big six-footer, 'bout thirty-five years old, not bad lookin' and a fighter."

"Fighter, eh?"

"Yes. He kin whoolop any man in Braddsbury."

"What is his business?"

"He owns a big farm a few miles out o' town. He has men to run it for him, though, and he spends most of his time in town. Oh! he ain't a bad feller."

"Did you know Mr. Carnsworth?"

"Yes, I knowed him."

"Was he a nice sort of man?"

"Yes, he was. Everybody seemed to like him."

"Had no enemies here, eh?"

"Not as I knowed of. Never heard of his havin' any."

"Did he have any especial friends? that is to say—any particular chums here?"

"No, can't say as he had. Him and Norton used ter go round together a good deal, though."

"Where did they go, mostly?"

"Oh, Morris he used ter take him round 'mongst th' farmers to git 'em insured."

"He used to find customers for Carnsworth?"

"No, not 'actly that; but he'd take him wherever he wanted ter go, and interdooce him."

"Oh!"

And so they talked for an hour or more—in fact, until the artist had finished his sketch.

When the final touch had been given, the artist-detective arose and said:

"There, my lad, what do you think of it?"

The boy's admiration could not be expressed in words—at least he could find no words to express it. All he could say was:

"I only wish I could do it, mister. Why, it's jest as like as kin be!"

"Well, you may have this. You can hang it over your father's bar. I guess it belongs to you, anyhow, for you first mentioned coming to this place, you know."

"Yes, but then, that's no reason why th' picture's mine, is it?"

"Well, perhaps not; but I'll give it to you, anyhow."

"Thankee, then, mister, and much obliged."

"Oh, that is all right, my boy."

Folding the easel and the stool, and packing up his other traps, Burt soon had his outfit upon his shoulder, and then he and the boy returned to the hotel.

Arriving there, the boy soon had the picture framed and hung, and he took pride in telling that but for him it would not have been painted, for Mr. Prince had no idea of going to that place till he mentioned it to him.

Morris Norton entered soon after the picture had been put up, and learning whose it was his suspicion of Walter Prince was somewhat undermined. Could any detective, merely acting the part of an artist, paint a picture like that? He reasoned not. Finally, he had a private talk with the landlord's boy, questioning him closely, and everything went to prove that Walter Prince was just what he seemed to be—an artist. Moreover, he had during the morning heard all about Alphonso St. Eric's adventure with the dog, and he saw that his suspicions of the night before were groundless.

CHAPTER X.

PRISCILLA AND ALPHONSO.

ALPHONSO St. Eric's first care that morning was to procure a suit of new clothes.

At an early hour he sent for a tailor, who came to the hotel and took his measure, promising to put forth every effort to have the suit made and delivered by one o'clock at latest.

The order delivered and his measure taken, there remained nothing more for him to do but sit in his room and wait.

And that morning, too, as soon as the door of the Open Door was opened, Colonel Emmery Cass entered for his customary morning dram, or eye-opener.

"Good-mornin', Tom," he said to the landlord; "is there any of my five-dollar bill left?"

"Good-mornin', colonel," the landlord responded. And then he added— "Yes, there's about sixty cents left. You went in pretty strong, you remember, and stood 'em up twice for th' house."

"Yes, that's so. I thought it must be gettin' well down. Ye see I tried hard to get rip-stavin' and paralyzed, but I couldn't fetch it. Takes a big load to put th' colonel on his back, Tom."

"Well, bein' as I'm good for it, jest set out my customary."

The landlord complied, and the colonel took an "eye-opener" of sufficient quantity to open both eyes.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, as he set down the glass, "the nectar of the gods! Food and drink of the angels! Bread and meat of the Kentuckian!"

"By th' by, Tom, I s'pose that red-head feller ain't up yet, is he?"

"No, not yet. Did you want to see him?"

"Wal, yes; but it don't matter, I guess. When he does git up, tell him I have gone over to Priscilla's to see about his gripsack and umbrella. Thought I'd go early while it's cool."

"All right, I'll tell him."

And that, when he arose, was the first information Alphonso St. Eric received. And the colonel, he thought, could not be a bad sort of man, even if he *had* called him "red-head."

The colonel was not a fast walker, but in good time he reached his destination.

When he turned into the lane he espied Beriah Simms, his daughter's hired man, at work in a field hard by.

"Hullo, Beriah!" he stopped and called out. Beriah looked up, and on seeing who it was, shouted back:

"Hullo, colonel! is that you?"

"Yes, it's me. Say, is Stonewall tied up?"

"Yes, he's tied, colonel."

"All right, then. Much 'bliged." And the colonel started on toward the house.

Miss Priscilla Cass was a woman about twenty-five years of age, and since the colonel has already introduced her, there is little more to be said. Still, in order that no false impression may be formed, and to set matters right if the false impression be already formed, we will add a few words more.

Priscilla Cass was not, as one might imagine to hear her father speak of her, a hard-featured virago, with more of the masculine than of the feminine in her appearance. She was just at the full bloom of womanhood, and although not handsome, was far from being bad looking. She was quite well educated, was refined and tasteful in manner and dress, had no false notions of pride, and was not afraid of work. She superintended her farm personally, and was an independent woman.

It is safe to say that James Cass, the colonel's dead brother, knew what he was doing when he left his farm to Priscilla.

On this morning she was out of doors when the colonel came down the lane, and when he came near and saw her, he stopped and inquired again concerning Stonewall Jackson.

"Priscilla," he said, "is Stonewall secure?"

"Yes, father," she answered, "he is tied up."

"And kin I come in?"

"Certainly. Have you had your breakfast?"

"No, I haven't; but then I didn't come for that, my girl. I'll take it, though, bein' I'm here. No, Prissy, I've come to ask you—"

"No, father, it is of no use asking, for I *will* not."

"Ha, ha, ha!" the colonel laughed, "thought I was goin' to coax ye to relent, didn't ye? Ha, ha, ha! No, no, Prissy, I've given up hopes of your ever relentin' to'rd me any more. I guess that dog is dead."

"You know what I have told you, father. I will give you a home here if you will stay, I will clothe and care for you; but give you money I will not."

"That's all right, Prissy, that's all right; but I didn't come to ax ye to relent, I came on business."

"What business?"

Concernin' Stonewall Jackson. Didn't he almost eat a man up last night?"

"I believe I did hear him driving some one out of the lane. Who was it? I hope he has not injured any one!"

"Nobody's killed, but it wasn't no fault of th' dog's, I guess. A young man came in here to inquire th' way to town, and Stonewall almost et him up alive. He lost his gripsack and um-

brella in th' tussle, and I've come to git 'em. Have ye seen 'em?"

"Oh! I am very sorry. But the young man should have been warned by the notice at the end of the lane— 'Beware of the dog.'"

"S'pose he didn't see it. Did ye find th' things, though?"

"No, I haven't seen them. We will find them in the dog-house, no doubt. Come on."

The colonel followed his daughter—at a safe distance, and to the dog-house they went.

Stonewall Jackson showed his teeth, but a word from Priscilla made him lie down, and then she looked into his house.

Sure enough, there the gripsack and umbrella lay.

The gripsack was secured with straps, and had not come open; but the umbrella—alas!

Priscilla pulled them out.

The gripsack was a new one, though now the worse for wear, and on it were the words—

"ALPHONSO ST. ERIC, M. D.,

Philadelphia."

"Why," Priscilla exclaimed, "the young man is a doctor!"

"Yes, so he says he is."

"Oh! I am so sorry this has happened! And look at his umbrella!"

The umbrella was a wreck of its former self indeed.

"Pretty well used up, that's a fact," the colonel agreed.

"Well," said Priscilla, "I will pay for it, if he will allow me to. Do you think he will?"

"Can't say, Prissy, I'm sure."

"Well, come in and have your breakfast."

The colonel went in, and Mrs. Simms arranged him a place at the table, while Priscilla dusted and cleaned the damaged gripsack as best she could.

An hour later the colonel set out on his return. When he reached the hotel he inquired for Alphonso, and the young man invited him up to his room.

"Ah! my deah colonel," he said, "I am glad to see you back so soon, weally."

He now indulged in his affected manner of speaking.

"Yes," the colonel returned, "here I be in right smart time, considerin' that I took breakfast with my daughter; and, sir, here's your grip."

"Ah! yes. And the umbwella?"

"Wal, we found th' stick, Mr. Erricks—"

"Saint Eric, my deah colonel."

"Yes; we found th' stick, and also a piece of whalebone with a bit of rag on it; but that was all."

"Ah! well, weally, I'm glad to get back my gwipsack. Most fewocious dog I ever saw, colonel, I assure you."

"You're right, there, for I've sampled him myself."

"Well, my deah colonel, aw—what do I owe you for your trouble?"

"Anything—anything at all. I'm not p'tic'lar."

"Will a dollah pay you?"

"A dollah—ten drinks. Oh, yes!"

"I said nothing about dwinks, my deah colonel."

"I did, though. You said a dollah, and a dollah to me means ten drinks. See?"

"Aw, well, just as you please, you know. Here is your money."

The colonel took the dollar, returned thanks for it, and then said:

"And now, sir, my daughter is comin' to town this afternoon, and she wanted me to say to you that she will call on you to—"

"Good heavens!"

"What's th' matter?"

"My clothes! Look at me! I must urge that tailor to do his vewy best."

"Oh! never mind yer clothes. Priscilla ain't in no wise p'tic'lar."

"Maybe not, my deah colonel, but I am, and I would not have a lady see me in my pwesent state for worlds."

"Well, if ye refuse to see her you kin bet she won't think much of ye. She's th' soul of honor, is Priscilla, even though she *don't* relent any more; and she's comin' here jest ter see you, to ask yer pardon fer Stonewall's doin's. You *must* see her."

"Aw—well, I s'pose it will be all wight. We shall see."

A little after one o'clock the tailor delivered the suit, and Alphonso was happy. As Colonel Cass expressed it, "the country was saved."

The suit proved to be a good fit, and "Richard was himself again."

About three o'clock Priscilla Cass drove up in a neat little fall-top, behind a spirited horse, entered the parlor, and sent up her card.

Alphonso, now dressed with care, even to his eye-glass, descended.

Somehow his idea of the colonel's daughter was that she was forty years old, at least, homely enough to turn sweet milk sour by looking at it, clad in a gingham print, and carrying a taggy umbrella.

Great was his surprise, therefore, when he beheld the lady just as she was.

Priscilla humbly apologized for the "rude-

ness" of her dog, and wanted to make good the damage he had done, which Alphonso would not allow, of course. And then they conversed pleasantly for an hour or more.

The colonel was not present, nor was he to be seen while his daughter was in town. He kept out of sight. Degraded as he was, he had sense of honor enough not to embarrass his daughter by his presence.

Priscilla, though, was not ashamed to recognize her father anywhere, much as his condition grieved her.

She spoke of him to Alphonso, and he advanced the opinion that the colonel could be cured of his love for drink.

"Do you think so?" Priscilla cried.

"I am sure of it."

"Oh! it is almost too good to be true. Willingly would I pay a thousand dollars—yes, everything I possess, to have him made a sober man."

"Aw—well, I am sure it can be done, and I think I can do it. I do weally."

"Oh, will you try? I will pay you well, and if you are successful I will be your friend forever."

Alphonso promised.

When they parted it was with the understanding that ere long Alphonso should call and see Priscilla at her home.

They were favorably impressed with each other.

When Priscilla was gone the colonel came to light again, and the very first opportunity he found he said to Alphonso:

"As I told ye before, Mr. Derriks—"

"St. Erric, my deah colonel."

"Yes, as I told ye before, if you're inclined to'd matrimony, there's your chance. Priscilla is a woman in a thousand, sir!"

CHAPTER XI.

NORTON'S CHALLENGE ACCEPTED.

DURING the afternoon Walter Prince was not seen around the hotel.

No one had seen him go out, yet he was gone, and his knapsack with him, as the landlord's boy ascertained by going up to his room.

The boy was more interested than any one else. Having been out once with the artist, he was anxious to go again, and to find that the artist had gone without him was a great disappointment.

Making inquiries, he learned that the artist had been seen making his way up the hill with his outfit on his shoulders.

Thinking he must be at the hillside spring, the boy went there, but failed to find him. Then he went to the place where the murdered man had been found. Neither was he there.

Greatly disappointed and tired, the boy returned home.

True it was, though, that the artist had been seen going toward the spring a little after dinner-time, as the boy had been told.

And to the spring he had gone, direct.

Resting there for a short time, and taking a drink of the sparkling water, he had started on; but instead of keeping to the road, he had made his way northward from the spring for a quarter of a mile or more, directly through the woods where there was no path of any kind.

When he came upon a little open place where a good view of the valley and the western horizon was to be had, he stopped.

"This will answer," he said half-aloud, as he put down his outfit.

Resting awhile, he unpacked his things, set up his easel, placed his tablet, unfolded his stool and sat down, mixed his colors, and then began to paint.

He took for the subject of his sketch a view of the valley and the western horizon.

For a time the landscape was copied faithfully and then, strange—most remarkably strange—to say, the sun was pictured as just setting, when, in truth, it was almost directly overhead.

What could be the object in this?

For an hour the artist-detective worked away earnestly, and at last the sketch was done.

And a pretty picture it was.

"There!" Burt exclaimed, as he arose from his task, "that's done." And he added:

"It will be a fine joke, now, if the sun happens to set behind a bank of clouds to-night, won't it! But, I must take the chances. Now for the rest of it."

Taking down his easel and folding his stool, he strapped them up, and then put away his tablet of paper, with the sketch still on it.

This done, he next opened a part of his knapsack which was secured with lock and key, took out a wig, a beard, a pair of old spectacles, and several other articles.

Then he undressed, and turning his clothes inside out, put them on again. The suit was a reversible one.

That done, he next put on the wig and beard, which were of the very best make, being of elastic lining, so that they set to the shape of his head and face so perfectly that it required the closest scrutiny to detect that they were false.

His next move was to take from a little box an artificial mole, a large one with three or four hairs on it, and that he pasted on one cheek. Then he painted his nose on the tip with some

sort of liquid until it looked exactly like the nose of a hard drinker.

All being done, he viewed himself in a pocket-glass and pronounced it good.

His disguise was complete, even to the old spectacles, and he looked like a man fully forty-five years old, a seedy old customer fond of his cups.

Putting away everything, and packing his "traps" in their water-proof cover, he put them under a bush and returned to the road.

Turning his steps toward the town, he went direct to the Open Door Hotel.

"Whar's ther landlord o' this heur shebang?" he asked.

"That means me, sah," the landlord responded, rising up and showing himself.

"Then you're jest th' man I want ter see. My name is Wiggins. Give me a drink." And as he spoke, he slapped some money down upon the bar.

The landlord set out his wares, and the detective took as large a dose as he thought would be good for him.

"Now, landlord," he said, "can you tell me whar ter find a man by name o' Morris Norton?"

"Reckon I kin, stranger. He was here 'bout noontime, and said he was goin' out to his farm. I reckon you'll find him thar."

A fact which Blue-Grass Burt was well aware of.

"Thunder!" he exclaimed, "I was in hopes I'd find him in town. Got to see him to-day, sure. Say, kin I git some one ter drive me out to whar he lives fer a reason'ble price?"

"Wal, stranger, I reckon ye kin. I'll send ye out thar m'self fer a dollar an' a half."

"Done! Trot out yer hoss, old man, and I'm yer huckleberry."

In about half an hour the rig was ready, and "Mr. Wiggins" got into the wagon and told the driver to "let 'er rip."

When they arrived at Morris Norton's place it was getting quite late in the afternoon, and Norton was found at the house.

The detective knew that Norton had a horse for sale, and that the horse was at the hotel stable at Braddsbury. The pretended object of his visit was to buy that horse.

Calling out from the wagon, Burt asked:

"Be you Morris Norton?"

"That's my habdle, sir," Norton answered, getting up from a bench on which he was seated under a tree, and going down toward the gate; "that's the name I answer to, stranger."

"Glad ter know ye. My name's Wiggins. I hear you've got a hoss for sale."

"Yes, so I have. He's over in town, though."

"Ther deuce he is. Why, if I'd knowed that, I needn't 'a' come cl'ar out heur. Guess it's all right, though. I want ter buy a hoss, Mr. Norton, and a good one."

"That's just what my horse is, Mr. Wiggins."

"What d'ye want fer him?"

"Two hundred and fifty."

"Sound?"

"Sound as a dollar."

"Just what I want. When'll ye be in town?"

"Why, I'll ride right back with you, at once."

"All right, that's jest th' thing. Git right in."

Norton got into the wagon, and then the driver turned and started back.

For some distance, a mile or so, perhaps, the detective talked of nothing but horse, and Norton felt sure of a sale.

Presently "Mr. Wiggins" dropped his handkerchief out of his hand and exclaimed:

"Whoop! hol' on, driver; there goes my han'-kercher!"

The driver stopped and Norton sprung out to get it.

It took him but a moment and he handed it to Burt with a "There you are, sir!"—and then put his foot upon the step to get in again, when, to his great surprise, "Mr. Wiggins" thrust a gleaming revolver under his nose and cried:

"Morris Norton, throw up your hands!"

Norton fell back a step and obeyed instantly, exclaiming:

"What in thunder do you mean?"

"I will tell you in few words. Last night, sir, a gold star badge was found and you bought it of the finder. Not only that, but you put it on your vest and challenged me to take it off. I accept that challenge. Step right up here, now, with your hands up, or I'll blow your head off."

"And you—" Norton gasped.

"I am—Blue-Grass Burt."

Morris Norton was as pale as death, and as for the driver, he was fairly quaking in his boots.

For a moment Norton hesitated, but seeing the deadly fire in the eyes of the man before him, he obeyed.

The detective opened his vest, still keeping the revolver pointing straight at him, and in a moment more the gold star was in its rightful owner's possession.

"Now, Mr. Norton," Burt then said, "step back. You challenged me to take this star from you, and I have done so. Stand right where you are, now, until I am beyond shooting distance, or I will fire. Driver, go on!"

"Oh! but you shall pay for this!" Morris Norton screamed in rage. "You shall pay for this!"

"All right," Burt shouted back; "present your bill and I'll honor it!"

Norton stood with hands raised until the wagon was some distance away, when, shaking his fist after it in impotent rage, he started on toward the town on foot.

When they had gone on a little farther, Blue-Grass Burt turned to the driver and said:

"Now, driver, you know who I am, and you can take your choice of two things: You can either get out and walk back to town, or you can earn a dollar by doing me a small favor. Which is it to be?"

"I—I'll earn th' dollar, I—I guess," the driver faltered.

"All right. It is easily done, and I will give it to you now. Here it is, and here, too, is the money to pay the landlord for the use of his rig. Don't fail to give it to him."

"No, sir, I won't."

"All right. And now pay attention: When we enter the town I want you to turn into the old road that leads across the hill, put the whip to the horse, and take me up as far as the hill-side spring. Do you understand?"

"Y-yes, sir."

"Mind that you don't forget," Burt added, "for if you do—" and he finished by tapping his revolver.

"Oh! n-no, I won't forget," the frightened driver gasped; and he didn't.

When he entered the town he increased the speed of his horse, and as soon as he turned from the turnpike into the old road, he plied the whip and away they went, much to the surprise of the landlord of the Open Door, who chanced to see them.

A short distance beyond the spring was a place where the wagon could be turned, and there Blue-Grass Burt got out.

"Now, my man," he said, "you turn and go back. And if any one asks you where I went, tell them you don't know. That will be the truth. Now—'git'!" And the man turning around as quickly as he could, 'got' accordingly.

CHAPTER XII.

SUSPICION DISARMED.

WHEN fairly started the driver looked around to see what the detective was doing, and beheld him walking straight on up the road at a rapid pace. The next moment he was lost to sight.

Then the driver touched his horse with the whip and dashed away for home.

It was now about sunset.

Blue-Grass Burt walked straight ahead until he knew he was out of sight, and then stopped.

Looking carefully around, he made two steps more and then gave a light spring, landing on a stone by the roadside.

There were his tracks, all plain enough up to that point, but there they ended as abruptly as though he had suddenly taken wings.

Burt glanced at them in a very satisfied way, and then turned away through the bushes toward the point where he had lost his knapsack.

He found the place with but little trouble, and proceeded at once to change himself back again to "Walter Prince, artist."

By the time he had done the sun was set, and it was beginning to grow dark.

Taking one last look in his pocket-glass, to make sure that he was all right, he shouldered his outfit and set out for the town.

It was with great satisfaction that he noticed the sunset was greatly like the one he had pictured in his sketch.

His game had worked well so far.

When he reached the Open Door he found Morris Norton there.

It was by this time dark, and the bar-room was lighted.

Burt took in everything at a glance. Norton was in a towering rage, and was making all sorts of threats. The late driver was there, bearing witness to all Norton said. And the lookers-on—they stood and listened in open-mouthed amazement.

Wanting to hear what was said, Burt dropped his outfit on a table and sat down.

He had played a clever game.

Morris Norton had made his challenge in public, and Burt intended that it should be publicly known that he had accepted it.

Had he attacked Norton when no one was present to bear witness and tell the story, the chances were that Norton himself would never have mentioned it; and for that reason Burt had planned to have a witness present.

That witness was the driver, and the detective could not have had a better one. The moment he returned, after taking Burt up the hill, he told the whole story, and when Norton arrived his defeat was known.

"An' ye don't mean ter say that feller was a real an' sure-enough detective, do ye?" the landlord was saying.

"You can bet your life he was, curse him!" Norton answered.

"Wal, I'll be hung!" the landlord ejaculated as he looked around at those present. "Who'd 'a' thunk it?"

"Nobody would."

"An' so he got back th' star, did he?"

"Yes, he did. He sha'n't keep it, though. I've got five dollars' worth of stock in that thing, and I'm going to have it."

"Wal, I don't see why ye didn't keep it when ye *did* have it," the landlord remarked. "You're a bigger man nor what he was."

"Toat be hanged!" Norton cried. "A pistol can make just as big a hole in a big man as it can make in a little man. Say, though," he added, "which way did that man come from?"

"I didn't see him m'self," the landlord answered. "But I heard some one say he kem down th' hill."

"And where do you say you left him Bill?"—to the driver.

"I left him just t'other side o' th' spring."

"And which way did he go?"

"Th' last I see'd of him he was a-goin' right straight on up th' hill."

"What did he say when he left you?"

"Told me ter 'git,' an' if anybody axed me where he went, ter tell 'em I didn't know."

"And you turned right around and came back, eh?"

"Bet yer life I did."

At that moment the landlord saw the detective for the first time and exclaimed:

"Why, hear is Mr. Prince! Maybe he has jest come over th' hill."

Norton wheeled around, his former suspicion suddenly aroused.

"Have you been out on the hill, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," Burt replied.

"And just returned?"

"Only a moment ago, sir."

"Did you meet any one?"

"Not a soul."

"Well, it's almighty strange, anyhow."

"What is the trouble?" Burt inquired.

"Why, I'll tell you. You remember last night, while you were here, old man Cass came in and showed a gold star he had found. I gave the old man five dollars for it. Then I put it on my vest inside, and all in fun challenged Blue-Grass Burt or any other man to take it off."

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, Blue-Grass Burt has accepted the challenge, and has made me give up the badge at the pistol's point. He came here in disguise, inquired for me, hired a horse and drove over to my place, pretended he wanted to buy a horse, and induced me to ride back to town with him. I got in and we started. When we'd got about a mile or so, the detective dropped his handkerchief—on purpose, of course—and I got out and picked it up for him. I handed it back, and was about to get in again, when he stuck a pistol right under my nose, and told me to hold up my hands. You see he had me foul, and I had to do it."

"He certainly had."

"Well, then he told me who he was, and took his badge as cool as a cucumber."

"And left you there?"

"Yes; he went right on and left me there."

"Well, it was a cool piece of work."

"You bet it was! But this thing is not settled yet. I've got a five-dollar lien on that gold star badge, and I'm going for it."

"But is your claim a just one?" Burt asked.

"You remember you knew the star did not belong to the man who sold it to you."

"That makes no difference to me; it's either the badge or the money."

"Well, I fear you will get neither."

"You fear I will get neither! What do you know about it?"

"Only this much: that you have no just claim, and from what you have said of the detective, I fancy he is not the man to stand any nonsense."

"We'll see about that."

"The man for you to look to for your money is the one who sold the star to you; and even there I fear you have no claim, for you knew just what you were paying for."

"You seem to have a great deal to say about the case, it appears to me, stranger!"

"Oh! I merely express my opinion as to the right and the wrong of the affair, that is all."

"And look here, stranger," Norton continued, "it strikes me a little queer how Blue-Grass Burt could know that I had his badge and had challenged him to take it. There was only one stranger in this bar-room last night when I bought the badge."

"And that was I," said Burt, coolly.

"Yes, that was you."

"And you think that I know the detective, and told him what I heard?"

"I think you are the detective yourself."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Burt laughed, "that is quite a joke."

"I mean what I say."

"Well, if you do I thank you for the compliment."

"Where have you been this afternoon, anyhow?"

"Well, my dear sir, it is none of your business, to speak plainly, but I do not mind telling you: I have been out on the hill sketching."

"Can you prove it?"

"Can you not take my word for it?"

"No, I can't. There is a loose screw here somewhere, and I want to know where it is. You are the only unknown man who was in this room when the badge was brought in, and I tell you again that I believe you are not what you seem."

"Well, my dear sir, you are addressing me in a manner I do not like, but to set myself right before all present I will prove that I am not a detective. In the first place, let me ask you if I am the man who took the star away from you?"

"But, you could have been in disguise."

"Nonsense! At what hour was the star taken from you?"

"About half an hour before sundown."

"Then I can show you the most convincing proof in the world." And unstrapping his knapsack, the detective brought out his tablet and exhibited his sketch.

"There," he said, "is proof that admits of no question. It is utterly impossible for a man to be in two places at one time, and I was more than an hour in painting this."

"That settles it," Norton admitted. "I beg your pardon, stranger. I was a fool to doubt you, after that other picture you made." And he pointed to the one over the bar.

"That is all right," said Burt, "I accept your apology. And now let me add this: If I am not Blue-Grass Burt, then I swear to you that I do not know him, have never seen him to my knowledge, and am just what I am—an artist."

"Oh! that is all right, stranger. Say no more about it."

"I kin tell ye one thing," said Bill, the driver, "and that is—I'll know that 'ere Blue-Grass chap on sight if I ever clap eyes onto him."

"You will!" Norton exclaimed.

"How will you know him? It is not likely that he will use the same disguise again."

"I don't keer *what* disguise he uses, I've got him marked."

"How—in what way?"

"Wal, there is a mole on one of his cheeks that he can't hide, no matter *what* disguise he's in."

"You're right!" Norton exclaimed. "Now that you mention it, Bill, I remember that mark myself."

"Stranger," turning to Burt, "I must ask your pardon again. I was hasty. You see, though, I consider that I have a claim on that gold star badge, and I don't want to give it up without a struggle."

"All right," responded Burt, "we'll call it square."

Blue-Grass Burt knew that Norton had a deeper interest in the matter than the one he named, and he meant to shadow him. He reasoned that if Amos Norman had been shadowing this man, there was every reason why he should do the same.

The unfortunate losing of his gold star badge had let out the secret that Blue-Grass Burt was in the neighborhood, and he plainly saw that suspicion was likely to fall upon him as being the man. By some fine work he had now fully convinced everybody that he was just what he seemed to be—an artist; no more and no less.

This point gained he would be able to act with almost perfect freedom. And the point was gained.

Now would come the real business, although some time might elapse ere he could lay all his plans for action.

Two facts were to be brought to light. One was—who had killed Amos Norman, and the other—to finish the business that detective had been engaged in when he met his death; namely, the unearthing of the band of "moonshiners."

Disarming all suspicion more completely still, the landlord's boy entered at this moment, and Burt said to him:

"Where were you just after dinner, my lad? I looked all around for you. I have been out again, and wanted you to go along."

"Sorry I wasn't round," the boy replied. "Guess I must be down to th' river a-swimmin'. I looked all around fer you, too, when I found you'd gone. Couldn't find ye, though."

"Well, we'll make it up next time, I guess."

"By th' way, Mr. Prince," said the landlord, "you'd better get your supper. They're keepin' th' table for ye, I reckon."

"True enough!" Burt exclaimed, "I don't want to miss that. I hadn't forgotten it, though, for tramping around through the woods makes one as hungry as a bear." And he soon took his place at the festive board.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

WHEN the moon came up that night, Morris Norton went out of town by the old road, and up the hill.

"There is a mystery here," he mused, as he walked along, "and I would give much to have it explained. Who is this Blue-Grass Burt? Where is he? How came he to know that I had his badge, and that I had challenged him to take it? Where did he come from, and where has he gone to? I must find him out at any cost. I'll go up to where Bill left him, and if no team has passed since, I may be able to track him."

Going on, he soon came to where the wagon had been turned.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "here are his tracks, and fortunately no one has passed since to disturb them. Now to follow them." And he started to do so.

In a few moments, though, he came to an abrupt stop, and exclaimed:

"Thunder! where did the man go to?"

There were the tracks, all plain enough up to that point, but there they ended.

Norton was puzzled, and for full a minute stood and gazed at the tracks like one bewildered.

Then he sought to solve the puzzle. He looked around, and his eyes fell upon the stone by the roadside.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "this explains it. He has sprung to that stone, and from this point has made his way through the woods. No fool is he, I'll swear."

Seeing that it was useless for him to look further, Norton returned to town, where he met Abel Winton.

"Where have you been?" Abel asked.

"I've been tracking a spy."

"Who?"

"Blue-Grass Burt."

"How do you know it was Blue-Grass Burt?"

"Because I have met him face to face, and he told me who he was. But, haven't you heard?"

"Heard what?"

Norton explained all that had taken place.

"And you say that the tracks leave the road and can't be seen again?" Abel inquired.

"Yes."

"And there you gave up?"

"Yes, there I gave up."

"Well, I can take the trail there and follow it to the end."

"You can!"

"Yes, I can."

"How?"

"With my dog."

"Heavens! I had not thought of it. Get your dog, Abel, and we will unearth this mystery yet."

"All right. You go back to the spring, and I'll join you there in a few minutes."

Norton went up the hill again, and had not waited long when Abel joined him with the dog.

"Now," he said, "we'll soon know where the man went to."

Taking the dog to the point where the detective had left the wagon, they put it on the scent and away it ran.

In a moment it came to the point where the tracks ended. Lifting its nose, it sniffed the air in all directions for an instant, and then turned toward the stone where the detective had next placed his foot. From that point it started away through the bushes, now and then giving a bark.

"Come on!" cried Abel; "the dog is all right now."

Following the direction the dog had taken, and guided by the barks, the two men hurried on.

Presently they heard the dog give a series of barks louder than usual, and knowing that he must have found something, they increased their speed.

When they came up they found nothing more than a place where the detective had evidently stopped.

It was the place where Burt had made his sketch and assumed his disguise.

Here it seemed impossible at first for the dog to find where the trail went on; but by going round and round, widening its circle each time, it presently bounded away again, barking as before.

Straight out to the road it went, and then back toward the town.

When Morris and Abel saw this, they were puzzled indeed. It was plain that Blue-Grass Burt had returned to town.

"Call the dog back," said Norton. "Don't let him get too far ahead of us."

Abel called the dog and made it keep near him, at the same time allowing it to lead the way.

In this manner they entered the town, and the dog went straight to the Open Door Hotel.

"There!" cried Abel; "our man is beneath this roof."

"Do you think the dog is to be depended on?"

"You know that dog as well as I do, Morris. He never makes a mistake."

"You are right, Abel."

"Well, what do you think now?"

"I don't know what to think."

"Do you think it can be that artist?"

"No; that is out of the question."

"Then who is it?"

"That's the question."

"Shall we go into the hotel?"

"Yes, we will go in, but not together. I'll go in first, and you come later."

"All right; but—"

"Well, what?"

"I wanted to tell you that you have a good chance to-night to speak to the girl. Jane and her girls have gone out, and Ettie is at home alone."

"All right, Abel, I'll go up there in a few minutes. I'll just take a look into the bar-room and see who is there."

A few minutes after these men, with their dog, had gone into the woods at the place where the detective's tracks in the old road ended so abruptly, a man passed by that way going toward the town.

This man was a peddler, a man about forty years of age, and he carried a pack on his back. Making his way straight into town, he had entered the Open Door Hotel about ten minutes before Norton and Winton arrived.

When Norton entered, the peddler was just registering his name, having engaged lodging for the night.

"Ah-ha!" Norton mentally exclaimed, "we have the deadwood on the fellow now. Thanks to the dog, we are certain of our man." And going straight up to the peddler he slapped him on the shoulder and exclaimed:

"Mr. Wiggins, how do you do?"

The peddler looked around, very much surprised.

"My name is Harris, sir," he said, "not Wiggins."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Norton laughed, "that is a good joke. You can't play your game any further, though, my fine fellow, and you can't cover me with your revolver again as easily as you did before, either. I'm on my guard now."

The peddler knew not what to make of all this and evidently thought Norton crazy.

"I do not know what you mean, sir," he said.

"Oh! no, of course you don't!" Norton returned. "Of course you don't. I can tell you, though, in few words. It means that you are not so cute as you may think you are, Mr. Blue-Grass Burt!"

The peddler was utterly astounded.

"No, sir!" Norton went on. "You can't play half as fine a game as you think you can. You hid your tracks well, but you couldn't hide the scent from a sharp-nosed dog."

At these words, Blue-Grass Burt, who was present, understood all.

A dog had been put on his trail, had followed it direct to the hotel, and this peddler had arrived in just the right time to have suspicion fall upon him.

"Perhaps, now," Norton went on, "you'll try to say you came here by way of the turnpike; but that won't work. We've had a dog on your track, and dogs don't lie."

"I tell you, sir," the peddler insisted, "that I do not understand what you are talking about. I am an honest man, and why any one should put a dog on my track, I cannot understand."

"Oh, of course not! Which way did you come here?"

"I came over the hill."

"Ah! you will own to that, eh?"

"Certainly. I am not afraid to tell the truth at all times."

"Then maybe you'll own up that you were here this afternoon."

"No, sir. I was never here before in my life."

"Ha, ha, ha! What man, what is the use of your denying it? We've got the deadwood on you as clear as can be."

"I cannot imagine how you can mistake me for another," the peddler said. "I am just what I seem, sir. My name is Ben Harris, and I am a licensed peddler."

"Certainly, certainly. And this afternoon your name was Mr. Wiggins, and you wanted to buy a horse."

"You are mistaken, sir; very much mistaken."

"Yes, to be sure. It is all a mistake. It is a mistake that our dog tracked you from the place where you left the wagon, right to this very room. Oh! yes, it is all a mistake; any one can see that."

"I assure you, sir, that it is a mistake."

"Very well, stick to it if you will."

"Who do you take me to be?"

"I take you to be a Government detective in disguise."

"And what if I were? Have you reason to fear detectives?"

Nothing the peddler could have said could have pleased Blue-Grass Burt more than this.

He watched Norton's face, and saw it turn color. It was but for an instant, however.

"No, I have no reason to fear man or devil! If you are the man I take you to be, though, you owe me five dollars for a badge. That is why I'm interested."

"Well, I tell you again, and once and for all, that I am not the person you take me to be. There is a mistake somewhere."

"Landlord, what do you say about it?" and Norton turned to him.

"My opine is, Morris; that this is not th' other feller."

"And what do you say?" turning to Bill, the landlord's hostler and peddler.

"I think same as th' boss, sir, that this heur ain't th' man. He don't look nothin' like t'other feller, nobow. Most of all, there's no mole on his cheek."

"Well, stranger, if you are not the party, then there is a mystery here as deep as the ocean. My candid opinion of you is, though,

that you are living like sin." And so saying, Norton who had around and left the room.

The peddler gazed after him as he went out, and then turning to those present, inquired:

"Say, is that man crazy, drunk, or a danged fool?"

CHAPTER XIV.

ANOTHER RUSE.

THE peddler's earnest inquiry as to Morris Norton's mental condition elicited a roar of laughter from those present.

"Wal, stranger," said Colonel Emmerly Cass, the veteran bumner, "he *does* seem ter be a leetle daft, on th' subject o' detectives. Maybe ye'd like ter hear what th' diffikilty is."

"Yes, certainly, if you've a mind to tell me."

"All right. I'll give it to ye jest as straight as th' pike. Ahem! er—a—my throat seems almighty dry—er—"

"Won't you take a leetle something to—"

"Don't keer 'f I do, stranger!"

In one second the colonel was at the bar.

"What is it, gents?" the landlord asked.

"As usual," said the colonel.

"And yours?" to the peddler.

"Whisky."

One bottle answered the wan's of both.

"Yum-yum!" the colonel exclaimed as soon as he emptied his glass, at the same time rubbing his vest vigorously in front, "but that is good. Oh! it is good! Light of my life and joy of my declining years. Thank ye, stranger, thank ye."

"My name, sir, is Colonel Emmerly Cass. I'm an old veteran. I served through th' hull war, and came out covered with wounds, scars and honors."

"I have a daughter, sir, Miss Priscilla Cass, who—though she seldom relents—is th' very soul of honor."

"I used to be worth—"

"But," the peddler interrupted, "I fear you are wandering from the point, are you not?"

"Oh! no, I was workin' round to it, stranger. Howsumdover, I s'pose I kin come to it straight. Family affairs won't interest ye, maybe."

"Perhaps not."

"Well, yesterday I was over th' hill ter see my daughter. Say, maybe ye noticed her house as ye kem along; white farm-house jest over th' hill, with—"

"With a sign up at the end of the lane, 'Be-ware of the Dog?'"

"Exactly."

"Yes, I noticed that place and was going in, but the sign kept me out."

"Most fortunate thing ye ever did in yer life, stranger. That dog's name is Stonewall Jackson and he's a holy terror."

"As I was 'bout ter say, though, I was over to see Priscilla yesterday, ter see if she wouldn't relent a little, and about dark I started back ter town."

"About th' time I crossed th' hill th' moon kem up, and when I kem down near th' spring—maybe ye noticed it—I see somethin' a-shinin' in th' road—I stopped and picked it up, and, stranger, what d'ye s'pose it was? It was a star of solid gold, and in th' center of it was a blazin' di'ming of th' first water."

"The badge that man tackled me about, eh?"

"Exactly; I brought th' star here and showed it, and Morris Norton—he's th' feller who jest tackled you—he gave me a vee-dollar William for it, and no questions asked. He read what was on it, and said it was the badge of a Government detective, a feller he called Blue-Grass Burt, or somethin' like that; and then he puts th' star on an' jest challenged any man ter take it off."

"And somebody did, eh?"

"You bet! Mr. Blue-Grass Burt took it as nice as ye please." And the colonel went on to explain how it was done.

"Then as I understand it," said the peddler, "this man Norton took a dog and tracked the man back to this hotel."

"That's what he claims."

"Well, when I came down the hill I heard a dog barking in the woods on my right, and no doubt that was the one. I came right on, and it seems I've got here just in time to be taken for somebody else."

"Now, gentlemen all, I assure you that I know nothing whatever about this matter, and I certainly am not a detective; but, since the dog came direct to this house, the man he was tracking must be here."

"Shall I give you my opinion of the case?" asked Blue-Grass Burt.

"Certainly!" cried the landlord, "let's hear from ye, by all means."

"Very well. In the first place, then, landlord, both you and your man Bill here are certain that this peddler is not the man who was here this afternoon as a Mr. Wiggins. Am I right?"

"Right you are!" the landlord declared. "This man hasn't such a rummy nose as that one had."

"No, nor he hain't got no mole on his cheek," added Bill.

"Very well. That point is settled then. It is certain that you two observed the fellow more

closely than Mr. Norton did, for he must have been in there or less excited."

"Right ye are, Mr. Prince, every time."

"Well, then, my opinion is this: The dog has struck the cold trail, the one made when the man came here this afternoon, and has lost the fresh one. I have heard of such cases."

"So have I!" the landlord instantly declared, "and that explains th' hull thing. Th' man ain't heur a tall."

At this moment who should enter the room but Abel Winton, with his dog at his heels.

The dog began to sniff the air the instant he entered, and after running around the room for a moment, went straight to the detective and gave a low growl.

"Down, sir!" Abel commanded.

"Your dog, sir?" asked Burt.

"Yes, sir."

"Is he the dog Morris Norton was using a short time ago?"

"Yes."

"Then, landlord," said Burt, "the mystery is all explained."

"The dog has followed my tracks. I tramped all around the hill this afternoon, until I came to the place where I sat down to sketch the sunset, and from there I came straight here. That place was about a quarter of a mile or so above the hillside spring, toward the north."

"Were you with Mr. Norton, sir?" to Abel.

"Yes," Abel replied, "he wanted me to go along to make the dog work."

"Then you can tell us where the trail led."

"It led just where you said you were, sir; to a place about a quarter of a mile north of the spring, and then back to the road again."

"That settles everything," said Burt. "The dog has taken my trail instead of the detective's."

"That's jest what's th' matter with Hanner!" the colonel exclaimed, as he leaned against the bar. "You've solved th' riddle, Mr. Artist, and it would be an honor to drink with you. I—"

"Certainly, colonel; call for what you want."

"Ah! thank you. Landlord, I'll repeat the dose."

The landlord set out bottle and glass, and the colonel took a good dose.

"Oh! milk and honey!" he ejaculated. "Oh! delicious beverage! I love it, I love it." And smacking his lips he sat down.

"Well," the peddler remarked, "if the excitement is over, I will finish signing my name. There, that's me; and now, landlord, if you can give me a bite to eat, I'll be all right."

"All right, stranger, all right. I'll see to that right away. Bill, you mind the bar a minute."

Bill nodded, and Colonel Cass, looking up with a faint and weakly smile, remarked:

"There was a time when Tom would ask me to do that, but them good old times is gone. Since Priscilla don't relent any more, he is growin' cold. He seems to fergit who built his barn fer him; who put th' wing to this house; whose money raised his kitchen, and a hundred other little items too numerous to mention."

"There was a time, stranger," to the peddler, "when I used ter be worth quite a—"

Back came the landlord, though, and called the peddler out.

After having his supper the peddler expressed his desire to retire at once, and asked to be shown to his room.

The landlord obliged him.

Blue-Grass Burt, meantime, had gone up, having first glanced at the register to learn what room the peddler was to occupy.

When the peddler came up, and the landlord had gone down again, then the detective knocked at his door.

"Who's there?" the peddler demanded.

"I—the artist, the man you saw in the bar-room," Burt explained.

"What do you want?"

"I want to tell you something—something important to you. Let me come in."

The peddler opened his door, and the detective stepped within.

"Are you a stranger here?" he inquired.

"Yes," was the reply, "I am."

"So I thought. Do you know that you are in danger?"

"In what way?"

"You are suspected of being a detective. I tried to disarm that suspicion by taking some risk upon myself, but it is safe to say I did not succeed."

"Well, even if I am suspected of being a detective, what is the danger in that?"

"I will tell you. There are some desperate characters here, and they do not allow a life to stand between them and success in their schemes. Some months ago a detective was murdered here, and no detective is safe here now. It is a fight to the death. You are suspected, and you must be on your guard every moment."

The peddler was now pale and trembling.

"And you?" he queried.

"I am but an artist, but I have been here long enough to understand these things."

"And what am I to do?"

"Well, if I were you I would call the landlord and tell him I wanted to set out for the next

town before daylight. Pay him well, and ask him not to mention it. He will do as you ask, and before the town is awake you can be miles away."

"I'll do it. I'm obliged to you for your kindness in warning me, sir."

"Do not mention it."

Next morning, much to the surprise of the landlord, his guest, the peddler, was gone. Not a word had he said, but had slipped away in the night. He had, however, left money in his room to pay his bill. Then, for the first time, everybody sided with Morris Norton in his opinion that this peddler was none other than Blue-Grass Burt. His scheme having failed, his disguise being known, he had hastened away.

CHAPTER XV.

JANE WINTON JAWS.

WHEN Morris Norton went out of the Open Door, after the words with the peddler, he met Abel Winton, and said:

"Well, we've got him down fine now."

"Is he in there?" Abel asked.

"Yes, he is there. He is now in disguise as a peddler."

"Did you say anything to him?"

"Of course I did. I told him to his face that his game was up."

"What did he say?"

"Why, he denied being a detective at all. And, by heavens! Abel, he is the best actor I ever saw! He almost convinced me."

"Perhaps he is a peddler. It is possible to be mistaken."

"Nonsense! You go in presently and see for yourself. Take the dog in with you, and if he don't point straight to that peddler, then call me a fool."

"But, Morris, see here."

"Well, what is it?"

"Don't you think you're making too much ado about this detective for our good?"

"I've thought of that same thing myself. I make it appear, though, that it is my five dollars I am after. I guess that will fix it to the satisfaction of the curious."

"It may; but it won't do to go too far."

"I understand that as well as you do. We must call a halt now. We have gained our point, you see."

Morris Norton went on then, and in a few minutes Abel Winton entered the Open Door, with his dog, as shown.

When Norton reached Abel's house, Ettie Winton came to the door.

"Good-evening, Ettie," he said; "may I come in?"

"Good-evening, Mr. Norton," Ettie responded; and then she added: "My father has gone out, sir."

"Yes, I know that; I have seen him. I came to see you."

"Came to see me?" and Ettie's face grew pale.

While these few words were being exchanged, the man pressed forward into the house.

"But what can you want to see me for?" Ettie asked, as Norton coolly sat down.

"Can you not guess?"

"I shall not try to guess."

"Then I will tell you."

"But, I do not want to know. I hope you will call when my father is in, sir, and—"

"There, there, now, Ettie, I will not be dismissed so easily, I can assure you. I have come here to speak to you, and to speak to you alone."

"Please do so quickly, then."

"Don't crowd me; I like to take my time. About a year ago, Ettie Winton, I asked you to become my wife, and you—"

"I refused, sir."

"Exactly. I would not give up, though, nor did I give up until your father actually forbade me placing foot upon the ground. Now, however, things are changed. I am here with your father's consent, Ettie, and once more I ask you to marry me."

"And again, sir, do I refuse."

"And why do you refuse? Am I not worthy of you?"

"I do not say that you are not."

"Then why do you refuse? I love you, Ettie—love you as I have never loved before, and I would strive to make you happy. I am far from being a poor man, as you know. I have as fine a farm as this country can boast of, and other property besides. Can you make a better match in this town, think you? Marry me, Ettie, and you shall live as a lady should."

"You have my answer, sir, and I hope you will not mention the subject to me again."

"But, why do you refuse?"

"Simply because I do not love you."

"But, you will learn to love me, Ettie."

"I do not care to experiment in the matter. I shall never marry until I do love."

"It is your father's wish, though, Ettie."

"I know it is, it is even his command; but I tell you, as I told him, I will never marry you!"

"Have a care, Ettie Winton! You may be forced to marry me."

"Never!"

"Suppose I tell you that your father's fortune—his very honor, in fact—depends on it?"

"Still my answer would be the same."

"Suppose I were to tell you that his very life is at stake?"

"Impossible! Still, if it were true, and the cause a just one, it would be my duty to save him. Then I might consent. But, it is useless to talk thus."

"Then you refuse, fully and finally, to become my wife, do you?"

"I do."

"Very well. Now listen to me: I tell you plainly, Ettie Winton, that, by fair means or foul, you shall be mine. Your father is as anxious to have you marry me as I am, and marry me you shall!"

"Never! Morris Norton, never!"

At that moment steps were heard, and Jane Winton and her daughters entered.

At a glance Jane understood what had been passing.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Winton," Norton said, rising.

"Good-evening, sir," Jane responded. "You are quite a stranger here."

"Yes, so I am. Abel has at last become friends with me, though, and I am once more free to visit."

"Yes, so I have heard him say. Well, I am glad it is so. You know, Mr. Norton, that I had nothing to do with that trouble."

"Certainly. Well, I will be going. Good-night, Mrs. Winton. And you, Ettie, remember what I have said."

Ettie made no reply.

"Good-night, sir," responded Jane. "You must call again."

"Thank you, I will." And the man went away.

"Well, Miss Goodey-goodey," Jane Winton then cried, turning upon Ettie, "and pray what answer did you give Mr. Norton?"

"My answer was 'No.'"

"Oh! it was, was it? Then you do not intend to obey your father, eh?"

"No; in this matter—in which my whole future is concerned, I do not."

"Oh—ho! and what will your father say to that, I wonder? A dutiful child you are, I must say. You are a fool, Ettie Winton, and nothing less. Where will you ever get another such offer? Morris Norton is rich. He owns his farm all clear and clean, and other property besides. You would live like a lady."

"I do not care what he is, I do not love him."

"Then you'll wait till you can marry for love, will you. And in the mean time, I suppose, I can go on a-workin' for you—workin' like a nigger and a slave, and goin' bare-backed for clothes while you can play the fine lady at home!"

"I earn most of my own clothes, if you please!" Ettie exclaimed.

"Yes, you do! You teach three or four rattle-brained little girls lessons in music, for a few miserable dollars a month, while I am here in the house a-toilin' and a-slavin' my life and soul out of me. And what do you do with your money? Do I or my children ever see a cent of it? Indeed not! You spend it all on yourself."

"And why should I not? Do I not earn it?"

"Do you not earn it? Oh! to be sure you do. But what am I doing at the same time? Am I not doing your share of the work here as well as my own? I suppose not, though. You would like to have it so, anyhow. But, it is true. I work and toil from morning till night, and then if any one can have a few minutes time to rest, it is you. Off you go, to show those rattle-brained things how to rattle de-bang an thump-thump on their piano—"

"You forget, mother, that I am also teaching Rose, Sarah and Grace."

"There! throw that up in my face, now. Is it any more than right that you should? Are they not your father's children? Are they not your half-sisters? Did I not do enough for you when you were little to repay you for all that you can do in return? But no, I suppose not. You are the pet, the favored one, while I am nothing and nobody. If any one can get clothes in this house, it is you. I and my children can go in rags. I can work and slave and toil till I drop dead and what do you care? For eighteen years I have been a slave for you, and I will be so no longer. I want you to understand that!"

But it is useless to repeat all the woman said. For full ten minutes she kept on, growing more and more excited all the time, and drawing away entirely from the point where she had started, until at last she flung herself into a chair in a fit of hysterics.

Unwilling to listen to argument, continually scolding and fault-finding, she made life miserable for all around her.

Ettie listened patiently, knowing well that it was useless to try to interrupt, until Jane flung herself down upon the chair, and then she rose and said:

"Mother, your words to me are as unreasonable as they are unjust. It is I who am to say whom I will or will not marry; not you. As to my expending for clothes the money I earn, I shall continue to do so. What else would you

have me do with it? I certainly do not intend to clothe you with it. It is for my father to provide for you, and that he does you cannot deny. I have no more to say, except that I hope you will never mention Morris Norton's name to me again."

With these words Ettie retired to her bedroom, where she cried herself to sleep.

When Abel Winton came home, an hour later, Jane had, so to express it, recovered her wind, and she opened upon him in a way that, under ordinary circumstances, would have driven him to spend the night in the barn. On this occasion, however, Abel was not disposed to stand any harangue, from a scolding woman least of all, and made use of language so forcible and determined that his amiable wife went trembling to bed.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MYSTERY CLEARED.

MORRIS NORTON returned to the hotel in no happy frame of mind.

He plainly foresaw trouble in trying to make Ettie Winton marry him against her will; but he was determined to possess her, and was prepared to risk everything to gain that end.

Desperate means, he knew, would have to be resorted to, but he was ready to employ them.

And Abel Winton—he would force him to do his will, now that he had him in his power.

When he entered the bar-room the peddler had retired, as had Walter Prince, the artist.

Winton looked up, and saw at a glance that the man had met with no success.

Norton sat down beside him.

"Well," Abel inquired, "what is the word?"

"A flat refusal," Norton answered.

"By heavens! but she shall answer to me for this. What did she say?"

"Let's go out of here before we talk business."

"All right."

The two men arose and took a drink at the bar, bade the landlord good-night, and passed out.

Turning their steps up the highway road, or turnpike, they walked leisurely, and as they walked they talked.

"Well," Abel again asked, "what did she say?"

"She told me in plain words that she will never marry me."

"But, she shall marry you!"

"Of course she shall, or it will be the worse for you."

"No need to threaten, Morris; I understand the position I am in too well to hesitate to do my part. What did you say to the girl?"

"Well, I asked her if she would still refuse if your fortune—your very honor—were at stake."

"And her answer?"

"Her answer was the same."

"She would still refuse, would she? We shall see."

"Then I asked her how it would be if your very life were at stake, and—"

"Morris Norton!"

"Oh! don't get excited, Abel. We have got to play strong hands to win this game."

"But, you certainly do not mean to—"

"I mean to do everything in my power to win that girl!"

"Well, go on."

"Well, when it came to that, she weakened. She said it would be her duty to save you."

Abel Winton groaned.

"At the same time, though," Norton continued, "she looked upon that as an impossibility. Little does she know the real truth of the matter."

"No, poor child!" the unhappy father repeated, "little does she know."

"And now, Abel, do you know what we have got to do?"

"I can guess what you mean."

"I believe you can. We must make everything known to Ettie, and frighten her into doing our will. There is no other way. That girl has a will of her own, and this is our only chance. Do you agree to it?"

"Yes; but give me a little time. Do not crowd me, or I shall go mad."

"Oh! take all the time you want. That is—a few weeks or so."

"Oh! this is terrible. Sometimes I feel as though I could end it all by suicide. I—"

"Now you are talking like a fool. In the first place, as soon as I marry Ettie you are safe forever. In the next place, you are doing the girl no wrong in thus compelling her to marry me. I love her, Abel, and once she is mine I shall strive to make her happy; which is more than she is at present."

"I know that well enough."

"Yes, I shall strive to make her happy. I am comfortably rich, and I promise you she shall live like a lady. Once she is mine I am sure she will learn to love me. She is blind to her own interests."

"Now, what about the peddler? Did your dog lead the trail home to him when you went into the hotel?"

"No, he did not."

"Did not?"

"No."

"What then did he do?"

"He pointed to some one else."
 "The dell and who was it?"
 "Walter Prince, the artist."
 Morris Norton stopped short, and looked at Abel Winton in amazement.
 "That is just the fact," Abel assured.
 "And the peddler?"
 "The dog didn't notice him."
 "Well, by all that's evil, this mystery staggers me."
 "It is easily explained."
 "Easily explained! How in heaven's name, tell me, can you explain it?"
 "Why, the dog must have started on the wrong trail. The artist was on the hill this afternoon, tramping all around, and took that sketch at the very place where the dog made the first stop."
 "Do you think it is possible?"
 "Why not? It is reasonable enough, I think."
 "What did the artist say when the dog pointed at him?"
 "Oh! he took it cool enough, and said right away that the dog must have followed him."
 "Then it may be the peddler, after all."
 "I believe it is; but, as you said, he is a wonderful actor. It is almost impossible to think he is anything else than what he seems."
 "I understood the artist had expressed it as his opinion that the dog had struck the cold trail, the one the detective made in coming here this afternoon, and has followed that."
 "Is that possible?"
 "It is possible, but it is not at all likely. My dog don't serve me such tricks. The last theory is the best."
 "That he followed the artist, eh?"
 "Yes."
 "And when you entered with the dog, what then?"
 "Well, as I said, he went straight up to the artist."
 "Is he your dog?" he asked.
 "Yes," I answered, "he is."
 "Is he the dog Norton was using awhile ago?" he asked then, and I answered "yes" again. Then he turned to the landlord and expressed his opinion that the dog had been following him. He said he tramped all around the hill, and then he explained his last movements, which were exactly the ones the dog followed."
 "That must be the secret of it."
 "Yes, I think so."
 "Some of these detectives are mighty shrewd fellows, and they say this Blue-Grass Burt is the king of them all. One thing is certain, he is the king of them all at assuming a disguise; you can bet on that."
 "I believe you there."
 A few minutes longer these two conversed, and then they parted, Abel Winton going home in anything but an easy state of mind.
 When they next met they had heard of the peddler's mysterious way of leaving the hotel, and all was made plain. He, they believed, was the detective, Blue-Grass Burt.

At last Blue-Grass Burt was free to act without danger of suspicion. The unfortunate losing of his badge had given him considerable of trouble, and had almost been the means of making his identity known; but now, thanks to his clever playing, the danger was over. Had he not lost the badge, perhaps he would never have been suspected; but undoubtedly it was better so, for, having been suspected, put to the test and cleared, it was not at all likely that he would be looked upon with suspicion again.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MOONSHINERS.

Now, with the reader's permission, we will introduce a new scene and new characters.

It was midnight.
 The night was clear, and the moon, sailing high in the heavens, shed her light over hill and valley.

About an hour previously a man had set out from Braddsbury, taking the old road leading up the hill.

Along that road he went until he came to the path which led past the place where Amos Norman had met his death, and into that path he turned.

Hastening along through the dark and silent woods, he soon came near the spot where the detective had been so foully murdered.

Then he came to a sudden stop.
 "My God!" he gasped, "how I dread to pass this place. Am I always to be haunted with these foolish feelings of fear and dread?" And as he uttered his thoughts half-aloud he wiped away the cold perspiration which had started out upon his forehead.

For some moments he stood as though undecided whether to advance or go back.

Presently he started on, and as he advanced he glanced around from one side to the other constantly, his hands tightly clinched and his lips compressed. His eyes were open wide, his hair seemed inclined to stand on end, and his whole appearance was one of the most abject terror. His actions were like those of a child that, having listened to horrible ghost-stories

during an evening, was afterward sent to bed alone in the dark.

Thus he advanced until he reached the big tree where the detective was supposed to have been set upon by his murderer, when suddenly a frightened rabbit sprung up in the path directly in front of him, and went bounding away through the bushes.

With a cry of terror the man gave one spring forward, and then ran as though his very life depended on his speed.

Nor did he soon stop, but ran on and on until he came out upon another road, fully a mile from where he had started.

There at last, he stopped.

"Fool! fool that I am!" he panted, as he wiped the perspiration from his face. "Shall I never be able to conquer these miserable fears? To think how I have been running! I, who never before knew what fear was. It is ridiculous! Still, since I have no control of my nerves, I will never take that old path again. The road is two miles longer, to come around, but hereafter I shall come that way."

After waiting a few minutes to regain his breath and cool off a little, the man started on.

This man was the murderer of Amos Norman.

Verily, the guilty flee when no man pursues.

Going down the road for some distance, the man presently turned into another by-path. This path led to an old cabin that stood in the very heart of the wood.

Here lived an old negro named Ebenezer Crowblack.

This darky was a queer old chap who lived all alone, and was seldom or never seen a hundred yards away from his cabin door.

How he procured his supplies was a mystery, for no one had seen him in the town for years.

As old Ebenezer was a harmless old man, though, and owed nothing to any man, no one molested him.

Straight to this old darky's cabin the murderer of Amos Norman went, and knocked at the door.

"Who'm dar?" the old man called out.

"Hurry up and open this door."

"I wants ter know who am dar."

"See here, you old fool! I'll kick your door down if you don't open it."

"Kick erlong if you wants ter, but dis door don't open 'fore I knows who you am."

"Eternal wars! don't you know my voice? I'm Captain Moonshine."

The last words were whispered through a small hole in one panel of the door.

"You am, am you? Well, jest whisper de password fru dis yere hole den."

The man put his lips to the hole again and whispered the one word—"whisky."

A moment later the door swung open, and the man stepped within. Then the darky closed and bolted it as it had been before.

"Golly, cap'n!" he exclaimed, "dat am de best password we hab had yit. Who would 'spect dat de fu'st letters ob de fu'st words ob what we was a-sayin' spells de pass-word? Oh! hit am bu'ly. You is de boy, cap'n. Dey can't fool Cap't Moonshine."

"There, there, Eb, that will do. The challenge and password are good enough. You only take care that you keep them fixed in your woolly head."

"Oh, don't you neber fear 'bout dat, cap'n. Nobody what kain't say dem 'ere words straight kain't come in heur, you bet!"

"All right. Are the boys all here?"

"Yes, ebbery one ob 'em."

"Good. Keep your weather-eye open wide, Eb, for the air is full of danger. The blue-coats are around."

"Sho! am dat so?"

"Yes, it is so. You can't be too cautious."

"Oh, neber you fear but old Eb will be wide awake."

"I guess you're right there. Well, open the door and I'll go down."

The old darky passed over to the opposite side of the room and raised a trap-door. Under it was a flight of steps leading down into the darkness below.

Having raised the door, the old man lighted a candle and gave it to the "captain," who, sheltering the light with his hand, immediately descended.

The darky closed the trap as soon as he was down, and remained in the cabin on guard.

Down to the foot of the steps and then across a small cellar the "captain" went, and then stopped before a heavy door. This he soon opened, and then stepped into a narrow tunnel-like passage.

Closing the door behind him as he had found it, he again sheltered his light with his hand and went on.

The passage was of good length, but the end was reached at last, and another door barred the way.

Here the man knocked.

In a minute or so some one was heard approaching from the other side, and then the same challenge as had been used at the outer door was repeated; and the pass-word being given, the door was opened.

Beyond was one of the natural caves of which

Kentucky can feel so justly proud. It was not a large one, as compared with the wonderful Mammoth Cave, but it was so large that all of it could not be seen from the entrance we have shown.

The moment the door opened Captain Moonshine passed through, and then to the guardian upon the inner side, said:

"I see you have the new challenge perfect, Jake?"

"Yes," the man responded, "I reckon I've got it down fine, cap'n." And as he spoke he fastened the door, and they proceeded down into the cave. We say "down," because the floor sloped away from the door at quite a steep angle.

Presently the end of the cave was reached, and the two men advanced along the wall until they came to a narrow opening, into which they passed.

A moment later they came out into another chamber of the cave, and there was an illicit still, going at full blast, with some eight or ten men hard at work.

"Here's Captain Moonshine," one of the men said, on seeing the captain enter, and the word passed from man to man.

"Where's your boss?" the captain asked.

"Here I am, cap'n," another man said, coming in sight from the other side of the boiler.

"Well, is everything all right?" the captain inquired.

"Yes," the man replied, "everything is goin' on finely."

"And you got those barrels off last night?"

"Yes, we got them off all right."

"Which way did you send them?"

"We took them by wagon down to the river and sent them in the small boat. That is one of our best ways of sending, I think."

"Yes, you are right. That way is not likely to be suspected, and that is what we must be on our guard against. I want you to use extra precaution in everything."

"Danger around, eh?"

"Yes, there is."

"Detectives?"

"Yes, the woods is full of them, literally."

"You don't say!"

"Yes, I do say. Since the finding of the remains of that other detective, you know, we must expect some sharp work. Word was sent on to Washington, you know, and no doubt every means will be put to use to find out the murderer, and also to wind up the business that fellow was at work at when he met his fate. And so we must be on our guard. Not that we are in any way responsible for that man's death, but we are moonshiners, and of course these blue-coats are always after us, hot foot."

"Let them come!" some one else exclaimed, "I guess we can entertain them."

"Yes, we certainly can," the captain agreed, "but we do not want to do that. If we can keep them from discovering our place, so much the better."

"Right again," the foreman agreed. "If they don't find us we won't have the trouble of entertaining them."

"And once they find our place of concealment," the captain added, "it is all up with us, unless—"

"Unless they shouldn't happen to live to tell of it, eh?"

"Exactly. Let one get away with our secret, and we would soon have a force after us that we would find it hard to entertain. And this is what has brought me here to-night. I hear that a detective has been seen here already, and the best one the force can boast of."

"Who is he?"

"They call him Blue-Grass Burt."

"Thunder! he's the one who cleaned out the business down in — county. They say he is a terror on springs."

"And I believe he is. We must be on guard, night and day. And now, my boys, how many of you are willing to stand by me to the end, no matter what comes?"

"I am!"

"So am I!"

"Here, too!"

"And I!"

Such were the answers from all present.

"It may be a fight to the very death."

"No matter, we're with ye to a man!"

"And your motto is—"

"Death to detectives and traitors!"

"Good. Stand by me, my boys, and you shall not lose by it."

Calling his foreman aside then, the captain of the moonshiners held a private conversation of some length with him, and then went away.

These were the men whom Amos Norman had been sent to hunt down, and whom Blue-Grass Burt had sworn to bring to account.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A STRIDE FORWARD.

SEVERAL weeks passed quietly away, and fulfilling the prediction of the *Braddsbury Weekly News*, five Government officers had arrived to clear up the mystery of Amos Norman's death, and search out his murderer.

These men wore the blue coats and bright but-

tons of revenue officers, and made no attempt to disguise their mission or to work in secret.

Their first act had been to visit the place where the body had been found. This they had done openly, and with a quarter of the population of the town following at their heels.

Next, they had employed a man to exhume the remains of the murdered man, in order to prove to their satisfaction that it really was the body of the missing detective.

This, too, was done openly, with great crowds around, and in the crowd was Walter Prince the artist.

Evidently as curious as any one else, he pressed forward eagerly to look at the remains, which the officers were giving every one an opportunity to do.

The artist cast his eye at once upon the forehead, where he knew Amos Norman had in life carried a deep scar, and there across the bare bone was the same mark.

He was satisfied.

He passed quickly on, and a little later the officers ordered the crowd to fall back, and the body was again interred.

There was great grumbling among those who were thus deprived of the privilege of feasting their eyes upon the horrible sight, but no one suspected the real object.

After these two seemingly unimportant moves, the five officers confined their investigation chiefly to the bar-room of the Open Door Hotel. Day after day they were to be found there, drinking and card-playing, and doing nothing more.

Finally, such conduct as this brought out the following in the *Weekly News*:

"A few weeks ago, when the remains of a revenue officer were found near here, we expressed it as our opinion that a force of officers would be sent from Washington immediately, and that the mystery would soon be cleared up. We never made a greater mistake in any opinion we ever advanced. Not that the officers have not been sent, for they have; but the mystery is as far from being cleared as it was on the first day of the discovery of the horrible crime. We are not detectives, and do not claim to know anything about detective work; but from all that we have ever read and heard concerning them and their ways, we do not hesitate to say that, in our opinion, five wooden men could clear this case of its mystery about as soon as these five gentlemen who are not (?) wooden are likely to do. We say what we mean, and are not afraid to say it. We think that if these officers would pay a little less attention to the bar-room, and more to the case they are supposed to be investigating, it would be more to their credit, even though they were to accomplish no more."

As may be imagined, this article caused a sensation.

The one of the five officers who was in command paid a visit to the office of the "News," and the interview he had with the editor was decidedly warm. The editor was a man of grit, and maintained his position manfully; and seeing that he was so thoroughly in earnest, the officer afterwards, in private, being advised to do so by Blue-Grass Burt, made a partial explanation as to what was going on behind the scenes and nothing more appeared in the paper.

From that time on, though, the officers were looked upon with almost contempt by the citizens, and longed for the time for action to come.

Little did the good people of Braddsbury imagine that these five men were under the control of Walter Prince, the good-looking young artist and were obeying his instructions to the letter.

We may mention here that Blue-Grass Burt and his officers were never seen talking together. In fact, they rarely spoke to one another. The detective had arranged means of communicating with them, however, and a perfect understanding was kept up.

Walter Prince and Alphonso St. Eric had long since become the social lions of the town.

Alphonso, after looking carefully about, had decided to stay at Braddsbury and hang out his shingle. Accordingly, he had rented an office and was fitting it up.

He had paid one or two visits to Miss Priscilla Cass's farm, and been more and more favorably impressed with the lady each time; while she, on her part, secretly loved the young doctor, and was resolved to win his love in return if she could possibly do it.

Her task was not difficult.

Priscilla reminded Alphonso of his promise to reform the colonel, her father, and Alphonso again promised to do all he could toward that end. As soon as he got his office and laboratory in order, he said, he would take the colonel in hand.

As for Walter Prince, it was not easy at first to understand why he should linger so long in so unimportant a place as Braddsbury; but at length it came to be understood that the object of his stay was—Ettie Winton.

In this the detective was not playing a part. He loved Ettie Winton honestly and honorably, and she made no attempt to disguise her preference for him.

In less than a month after their first meeting it was generally believed that they had plighted their troth; and the lovers not denying the rumor, it finally became accepted as a fact.

Abel Winton, almost beside himself, took Et-

tie to task about it, and she acknowledged to him that it was true.

Had he been free to act his will, Abel would cheerfully have given consent to their union, for he liked the young artist extremely well; but as it was, he was obliged to obey the will of Morris Norton.

In spite of all Ettie's pleadings he still insisted that she should marry Norton and none other.

At last Ettie pleaded no more. She assumed an attitude of defiance, and it was soon no secret that she was in the habit of having stolen interviews with her lover.

The young detective did not venture to put himself in Abel Winton's way after having been forbidden his premises, but he was made more than welcome everywhere else, and the whole town was in full sympathy with the lovers.

Morris Norton could ill conceal his jealous passion, but feeling secure in his hold upon Abel Winton, he had no fears of losing. When it came that Ettie began to defy her father openly, then Norton began to prepare for war. He urged Abel on to the verge of desperation.

Blue-grass Burt, having been told by Ettie that it was her father's desire that she should marry Norton, was not blind to the fact that he was heartily hated by his rival, and he kept a wary eye upon him.

The chief of the officers who were under Blue-Grass Burt's command was a much older man than Burt, and it was with a feeling of pity that he saw how much Ettie Winton loved the young detective.

He, the officer, thought Burt was simply making a tool of her in order to gain some end in the case in hand, and he could plainly foresee that when the *denouement* came she would be left broken-hearted.

In one of his communications to the detective he mentioned the matter. He was, he said, of the opinion that, generally, the end would justify the means in hunting down criminals and bringing them to justice. In this case, though, he thought otherwise. He thought it a pity that Burt should win the love of so pure and pretty a girl only to cast her aside when the case was ended.

This, of course, was made a private matter as between man and man, and not a suggestion from subordinate to superior.

Burt laughed heartily, and his answer was to the effect that the officer might put his mind at ease. He loved Ettie Winton, he confessed, and if he could win her hand in marriage he meant to do it.

The officer was so well pleased at learning this that he could not resist smiling approvingly the next time he saw Burt, and in his next communication he said:

"My mind is easier. I feared you were only making a decoy of her. Not in all the world could you make a better choice. Go in and win her."

Thus stood affairs at Braddsbury at the end of several weeks from the time of which our first chapter treats.

Let us now resume.

CHAPTER XIX.

REPORT OF PROGRESS.

THE reader may be desirous to know what progress, in all these weeks, Blue-Grass Burt had made, and we will answer the query here.

He had made a great deal of progress, and yet apparently very little. On the day previous to the arrival of the five revenue men, he had paid another visit, alone, to the place where Amos Norman's body had been found.

This time he made a thorough examination of the ground, spending as much as two hours at the task, scanning every inch of the earth for some distance along the old path in both directions from the large tree, of which mention has been made, and from the tree to the spot where the body had been found. This he examined most carefully.

At last he was rewarded. He found a button—evidently a coat-button. This he put carefully away, still continuing his search.

A detective must possess patience above all other qualities. He must have a patience that is untiring; and such patience Blue-Grass Burt had.

For full two hours he bent over his task, not allowing a single inch of the ground to go unexamined. Every leaf, every tuft of grass, and every object was pulled aside, so that if anything had been lost there he would be certain to find it.

He had little hope of finding anything more, but still he was too careful and practical a man to take it for granted that nothing more had been lost.

Whatever he did, he did thoroughly.

At last, in pulling aside a little bush which he knew had grown there since the murder had been committed, something bright caught his eye. It was but a speck, whatever it was, and was lost again in an instant by some loose sand falling over it, but the detective meant to know what it was.

Brushing away the sand he was soon rewarded for all his trouble. There lay what was evidently a watch-chain, with two or three links of chain still attached.

Snatching it up, Burt sprang to his feet and wiped the dirt from it, and then carefully examined it.

A charm it was—a miniature of a hunting horn, and attached to it were two whole links and a broken one.

"Ah-ha!" he mentally exclaimed, "I have a clew. This chain did not belong to Amos Norman. Now, to find an owner for it, and then—But, I must be cautious. I will spend weeks—months—if necessary, but I will make sure of my ground before I move to action openly."

This was the progress the detective had made in one direction. And this was not all.

He had his eye upon the lonely cabin of old Ebenezer Crowblack.

He had tramped all over the hills for miles and miles, in search of signs in fact. At first he had confined his attention to the northward from the old road, and after exploring that region to his satisfaction, and without any result other than the result of failure, he next turned to the southward.

There, one day, he came upon the path which led to the old negro's cabin.

Seeing that it was a path well worn, it interested him at once. Turning into it, he soon came to the cabin.

Old Ebenezer was hoeing in a patch of corn not far from his door.

Halting at the edge of the small clearing to get a view of the place, Burt made two discoveries.

One was, that the path led straight to the cabin door, and showed tracks of several different persons in places in the loose sand; and the other was, that the windows of the cabin were closely shut and barred.

Two thoughts came to him at once. This old negro must have a large family, or else he had a goodly number of visitors; and if he had either, it did not seem natural to find the windows all shut up and barred as they were.

Here was a mystery.

After taking in all he could of the cabin and its surroundings, the detective advanced to where the old darky was at work.

Walking as silently as he could, the old man did not see him, and he was soon right upon him.

"Hullo! Uncle Tom, how 'goes it?" he exclaimed.

"Wha—wha—" the old man gasped, dropping his hoe and turning round instantly, "what dat yo' say?"

Burt saw that the old fellow was quite startled.

"I said 'How goes it?" he repeated.

"Yes, but what yo' done called me?" the old darky asked. And with the question he stepped out into the path and stood between Burt and the cabin.

"I called you 'Uncle Tom,'" Burt explained.

"Didn't I hit you right?"

"No, sah, you didn't."

"What is your name, then?"

"My name am Ebenezer Crowblack, sah."

"Oh! a very appropriate name."

"I 'spect it am, boss. An' now what does yo' want heah?"

"Why, the fact is, I'm lost. I want to get back to town. Seeing the path out yonder, I followed it in and here I am."

"An' yo' wants ter git ter town, hey, does yer?"

"Yes."

"Wal, yo' jis go right out dar to de oder path, turn to de right, foller dat path till yo' comes to de old road, turn to yo' left, an' den you'll soon see it."

"All right, and very much obliged to you. May I trouble you for a drink of water?"

"Yes; yo' stay right whar yo' am, sah, an' I'll fotch yo' er drink."

"Oh! I won't trouble you so much as that; I'll go as far as the door."

"Now look 'e heah, white man, if yo' wants er drink yo' stay right whar yo' am. I don't low nobody ter go foolin' roun' heah, I don't."

"Oh! all right, then, uncle; I thought I would save you a few steps, that was all."

"Dat am all right, sah. But yo' jist stay right whar yo' am. I'll fotch yer drink right to yo'."

"All right."

The old darky advanced to the house and entered, and Burt gazed after him, wondering what secret the old fellow was guarding of. That he was guarding something he knew full well. And a poor enough man he was for the part, too; for, had he been a little more natural in his actions, less suspicion would have been aroused.

When the negro came with the water Burt thanked him, and after taking a drink, remarked:

"Your family are all away, I suppose."

"No, sah, dey hain't; de fambly am all ter home. I'm de hull fambly meself, sah."

"Is that so?" in surprise; "why, I thought there must be five or six living here at least."

"No, sah; I lives all erlone."

"Then your neighbors must call on you frequently, I guess."

"Look 'e heah, white man, what does yo' mean, anyhow?"

"Why, I mean the tracks here in the path. I supposed quite a number of persons lived here in-

your cabin. Since you say you live alone, however, I conclude that your good neighbors call often to see you."

"Oh! yo' means dem 'ar tracks!"

"Yes."

"Dem 'ar ones in de path!"

"Certainly."

"Wal, er—dem 'ar tracks? Dem 'ar ones in de path? Why, er—dey is made by my neighbors, sah."

It was clear that the old man was a little confused.

"Yes, to be sure," said Burt. "That is what I said. Your neighbors call frequently to see you."

"Yes, sah; so dey does, so dey does."

"Ah! you sly old rascal," Burt exclaimed, laughing. "I suppose you have a fiddle, and can sing songs and tell stories by the hour. No wonder you have plenty of visitors."

The old darky grinned from ear to ear. If this fellow could be fooled so easily, why, let him suppose what he would.

"I thought so," Burt added, as the old man did not reply; "I thought so." And he finished drinking.

"Want some more water?" Ebenezer asked.

"No, thank you, uncle; no more. I'll be going now. Very much obliged to you for your directions."

"Not er tall, sah, not er tall."

Burt went the way he had come, and Ebenezer grinned after him and chuckled to think how he had fooled him.

Never had the old man "given himself away" so completely.

This was the progress he had made in another direction. Nor yet was this all.

Having now a clew to the murderer, and having also, as he believed, found the meeting-place of the moonshiners, he set to work to follow up both trails.

Amos Norman had been sent to hunt down this band of moonshiners, and had met his death—had been foully murdered; and it was but natural to suppose that the outlaws were responsible for the crime.

Two cases now rested upon Blue-Grass Burt's hands. One—to finish the work begun by Amos Norman; the other—to ferret out the man who had murdered him. Knowing that to the moonshiners the crime belonged, he turned his first attention to them. Once they were run down, then the matter of finding the guilty one, he reasoned, would be comparatively easy.

Having his suspicion drawn to Ebenezer Crowblack's cabin, he next proceeded to shadow it as best he could, and at the end of the several weeks of which the last preceding chapter treats, he had three of the old darky's visitors tracked to their homes.

All things considered, he had made good progress.

Since finding the watch-charm, too, he had been constantly on the alert for the chain to which it belonged. Nor had he neglected the button. He had, in one way or another, managed to get acquainted with almost every person in the town, but thus far he had added no clew to those already found.

He began to look upon it as a difficult case.

Still he was determined to work it out. His oath was taken, and not only was he duty-bound to avenge the death of his friend, but he was to vengeance sworn.

No rest would he know until his task was done.

The main object of his attention was the band of moonshiners. Once he could discover the identity of them, he would have a fairer field in which to accomplish the rest. And, as has been said, he had thus far found out three of them.

He had not been by any means idle.

This supposed query of the reader answered, we will now dip our pen anew.

CHAPTER XX.

A QUESTION ASKED.

ALONG in the forenoon of a beautiful day, Walter Prince set out alone from the hotel to keep an appointment with Ettie Winton.

Nearly all the meetings of the lovers were, of necessity, clandestine.

The trysting-place, to-day, was the charming spot where the first scene of our story is laid—the spot where the sturdy old oaks joined their leafy hands above the sparkling hillside spring. And no fairer spot could have been selected. It was a bower worthy of the gods. The summer being well advanced, the place was, if possible, even fairer than when we first described it. The moss and grass were softer, finer, deeper and greener than before, and the spring seemed to more sparkling, as it bubbled up in its rocky basin. All around were wild flowers of the most beautiful colors and tints, and of the most delicious odors; every zephyr being laden with the sweet perfumes of the eglantine and wild honeysuckle.

When the artist-detective arrived there, he found he was nearly an hour ahead of the appointed time; and being more than ever struck with the beauty of the spot, he resolved to begin a sketch of it.

It is understood, of course, that he never set out for the hills without his artist's outfit.

Having decided to work while he waited for the appointed hour and the charming maiden it would be certain to bring, he looked about to find the most suitable point of view.

He soon selected it—a retired spot behind some bushes, and about the right distance away for best effect. Here, while almost hidden from sight himself, he had a fine view, through an opening in the bushes, of the scene he desired to copy.

And a charming picture if faithfully portrayed, it would make. It was worthy the best effort of any artist in the land. The extreme background was the rock, of an almost gray-black color. Before that, and revealing it here and there, was the green foliage, richly relieved by the flowers. At the foot of the rock was the spring. On each side was a giant oak, and between them and just above the rock was one open spot of clear, blue sky. This was the only sunny spot, except the reflection in the water and the light upon the grass in the immediate foreground.

The artist was charmed, even before he put brush to paper; and after he had actually begun to paint—well, all else save art was for the time being forgotten.

An hour later he was still at work, and even the fact that he was there by appointment seemed to have escaped his mind.

It was Ettie who had chosen this retreat for their next tryst, and had Burt thought to consult his watch he would have found that she was late in coming. She had that morning gone to see her friend Kate Nelson, who was still lingering between life and death, and intended to keep her appointment with her lover on her return.

Half an hour later than the time she had named, she came hastening down the old road and turned into the secluded retreat.

The sound of her footsteps recalled the artist-detective to himself.

Glancing up he caught sight of her sweet face with its winning smile, and was just in time to see that smile fade with a look of disappointment when she made the discovery that he was not there to meet her.

He was just on the point of making his presence known, when Ettie stepped forward to the edge of the spring and stopped just where the light fell upon her.

The artist was spell-bound. Had an angel suddenly sprung into the scene before him? For a moment he did not stir.

"I am too late," he heard Ettie say. "Walter has tired of waiting—No, it is not that," she quickly added; "he has not yet come. He, too, is late. I know that he would wait for me longer than one short half-hour. I am sure I would for him. No, something has detained him, and I will sit down and wait."

Selecting a spot, she sat down, and her face came in profile directly against the bright reflection on the water.

Again Burt had been on the point of stepping out to her, but this position so much improved the whole scene that on the instant he resolved to have Ettie in his picture.

It was too late to alter the sketch he had begun, but he could make another at some other time, so catching up a tablet of smaller size than that he was using, he began to sketch anew with pencil.

Minute after minute passed, and the artist worked rapidly for fear the girl might change her position.

Ettie did not stir, however, but sat and gazed thoughtfully into the water until at last the sketch was done.

Then, rising from his stool and stepping toward her, the artist-detective said:

"Ettie, my love, forgive me."

At the first sound the girl sprung to her feet in a startled manner, but at the words the warm blood mounted to her cheeks and she turned toward the point whence they came. As she did so the bushes parted, her lover stepped out into view, and then as an exclamation of joy burst from her lips, he was at her side with a single bound, and she was in his arms.

When the first ecstasy of their meeting had subsided, Ettie asked:

"But, Walter, what am I to forgive you for?"

"For admiring you in silence for twenty minutes or more."

"Oh, you were here when I came?"

"Yes."

"And why did you not speak to me?"

"I will show you."

Burt brought out the sketches he had been working at.

"Oh! how beautiful!" Ettie cried as she saw the first one. And then she added:

"Were you, then, so fascinated by your work that my coming could not draw you from it?"

For reply Burt showed her the other sketch—the one of herself.

Ettie could not speak. She could not praise her own beauty and grace, and she could not say a word about the picture without. She could only blush even more prettily than before, and let fall her eyes from her lover's fond gaze.

"I think you have tried to flatter my appearance," she at length managed to remark.

"Tried to flatter your appearance?" Burt ex-

claimed. "Why, Ettie, it would require the pencil of an artist divine to do your beauty justice."

"How vain I should be were I not deaf to such idle nonsense as you shower upon me."

"Call it nonsense if you will; I mean it—every word."

"How fortunate it is, then, that we cannot see ourselves as others see us."

"Tell me, though," she added, "what do you intend doing with this sketch of me? You are surely not going to spoil the other by putting the indolent-looking girl beside the spring in that?"

"No, indeed!" Burt replied. And then pausing for an instant, he added:

"No, I am not going to 'spoil' my picture by putting the day-dreaming girl into it, but I am going to enhance its value a hundred-fold by so doing."

"Flatterer! I see you will not cease."

"How can I?"

"And after you have completed the picture, what then?"

"I shall keep it—I shall keep it and prize it forever."

"Nonsense!"

"Indeed, no. I shall make a careful study of it in oil, and it shall be my masterpiece. But why do you ask what I intend doing with it?"

"Because, one must be naturally desirous to know what is going to be done with one's own likeness."

"Do you suppose your friends could recognize it as yours?"

"Could they? It could not be more like me if—"

"Ah! then you *do* acknowledge your beauty and grace, since you say it could not be more like you. Your compliment to my skill pleases me. Still, I must insist that it *could* be more like you. I have not done you half justice."

"I acknowledge nothing, sir. I was about to add—if you had not made such an attempt to make your picture shame the original."

"Well, let us not quarrel about it, Ettie. Since we cannot 'see ourselves as others see us,' as you said only a moment ago, let me assure you that this sketch is a vain attempt to put on paper a likeness of yourself as I see you. I call it a vain attempt, because I have failed to do you half justice, as I said."

"And you intend to keep the picture, you say?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Because I meant to ask you to give it to me, just as it is."

"What! give to you what I prize more than treasure of gold?"

"Yes; you can take a copy—"

"Never! Ettie, my darling—my life! there is but one thing on earth I prize more than I do this simple sketch, and that is yourself."

"Walter!"

"It is true!" And flinging both the tablets down upon the grass, the artist-detective caught the girl's hands in his, and passionately continued:

"Yes, Ettie, it is true. There is nothing on earth half so dear to me as you are, because—Ettie, I love you!"

"Oh! Walter, let go my hands; please do. I should have been home long ago. I—"

"No—no, my little love, I will not let go your hands; not, at least, until you answer a question. I love you, Ettie—madly, devotedly love you, and have loved you since the hour I first saw you. I love you so dearly that life without you would not be worth the living."

"You would like to have these two sketches I have made, you say. I will give them to you—on one condition, and that is—that you give me the original—yourself."

"Ettie Winton, will you become my wife?"

Ettie, blushing like a rose at first, then turning pale, then growing paler still—as pale as death, then trembling violently as her lover's impassioned words fell upon her ears like dew from heaven upon a thirsty flower, burst suddenly into a flood of tears, throwing her arms about her lover's neck and letting her head fall upon his breast.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN ANSWER WON.

BLUE-GRASS BURT was both surprised and pained. Surprised to see the effect his declaration wrought, and pained to see tears flowing from eyes so tender, beautiful and true.

"Ettie, my pet!" he exclaimed in tender tones, "what is it? What have I said or done to cause you to weep like this? Speak to me, my darling! speak."

"Oh! Walter, why did you—oh! why did you!" the girl sobbed, and her tears burst forth anew.

"Why did I what? Explain yourself, Ettie. What is it I have done?"

"Oh! you have broken my heart."

At these words the artist-detective was mystified more than ever. What could the girl mean?

"I have broken your heart? How can that be? I confess I do not understand you, Ettie. Pray dry your eyes, my love, and tell me plainly—calmly what you mean."

After a few moments the girl raised her tear-stained face, and said:

"Walter Prince, I love you—I love you with all my heart, and I have loved you from the hour when first we met. I—"

"Oh! my darling, my darling!" the young detective cried. And he pressed the girl to his heart and showered kisses upon her face. "How happy—how unspeakably happy you make me!"

"Alas! if your love for me is like mine for you, Walter, I shall only make you miserable."

"Make me miserable, my love! You! Explain, oh! explain what you mean."

"I mean that I can never marry you."

"My God! do not tell me that. Can never marry me—never become my wife? Oh! that were worse than death."

"It is true."

"Why—why is it true? You say that you love me—"

"Yes, a thousand times, yes. I love you more than life itself."

"And I love you so much that I cannot live without you. Why, then, can you not become mine?"

"Because, as you know, my father will not allow me to do so."

"Heavens! and you would blast your life and mine to obey him?"

"It is my duty to obey him."

"It is not! It is the duty of a *child* to obey its parents, Ettie, but you are a woman. It is not your duty to blight your own happiness to obey your father in a matter of such import. It would be nearer a sin to obey than to disobey. I know your father is set against me; has forbidden me his premises; has even forbidden me ever to speak to you. Why is it? Does he think I am unworthy of you? If so, I can satisfy him as to who and what I am—at least I can in a few weeks; and he will find that I am an honest man, and—"

"No, no, no! It is not that, Walter, it is not that."

"What, then, is it?"

"It is because he has said that I must marry another."

"Not Morris Norton!"

"Yes, him."

"And do you love him?"

"No. I despise him instead."

"But you will marry him to please your father?"

"No, never! Never will I become the wife of Morris Norton."

"Why, then, in the name of the fair heavens, will you not become mine?"

"Because, since I cannot obey my father in marrying Morris Norton, I must obey him in not marrying you."

"Oh! Ettie, Ettie. You said that I had broken your heart; it is you, instead, that are breaking mine. How, I ask you, could you say that of me?"

"I will tell you. I loved you, Walter, but I loved in silence. I thought, I hoped, that you were only pleased to have my company while you are here, and would forget me in a week after you had gone away. I say I hoped this, because then I would cause you no pain. You have sought my company, and I have been drawn into yours. To be in your presence is to be in the sunshine of day; to be away from you is night. To be separated from you for all time will be death. Still, to save you pain, I suffered in silence, hoping that you would not learn to love me, well knowing that if you did it would be pain to you as well as to me to part. So, when this hour you declared your love so ardently, you were only thrusting a heated dagger into my heart; for I knew—I know now—that I am the cause of the pain you feel." And again the poor girl fell sobbing upon his breast.

Neither beheld a pair of flashing eyes—an evil, passion-distorted face—that glared at them from behind one of the large trees. It was the face of Morris Norton.

"Ettie," said the detective, as calmly as he could, "will you answer a few questions?"

"Yes."

"Is the reason you have given the only one you have for not becoming my wife?"

"It is."

"In the town, Ettie, I have heard it said that your father once forbade Morris Norton his house, even his premises, when he asked for your hand. Is this true?"

"It is."

"How is it, then, that he now desires you to marry him?"

"I do not know."

"You must suspect, though."

"Yes, I do."

"Well, what is your suspicion?"

"It is this: I believe Morris Norton has my father in his power, holds some papers against his property, or something of the kind, and threatens to ruin him if I do not marry him."

"And your father would sacrifice you to save his property?"

Ettie's eyes flashed fire. She had not caught this view of the case.

"And I hear too, Ettie," the detective went on, "that your home life is far from pleasant. Is this true?"

"Yes, it is true. I am very unhappy."

"And I would strive to make you happy all your life!"

Burt said this sadly, sorrowfully, and Ettie bowed her head in silence.

"Ettie," the lover next spoke, "say that you will be mine."

She was still silent.

"Say that you will be mine," he pleaded.

"In a few weeks I shall be—"

"In a few weeks it may be too late," Ettie remarked, half unconsciously.

"Too late! What do you mean?"

"I mean that— But I will tell you all. My father says that I *shall* marry Morris Norton, and in a short time. I fear he means to use force, and if so—"

"And if so?"

"The river will end my sorrow."

"Ettie, this must not—*shall* not be. You say you cannot obey your father in marrying Morris Norton, and yet you would let him force you to end your sorrows in death. Duty is one thing; submission to cruel tyranny is something entirely different. I offer you love and happiness; your father forces upon you a hated union, to escape which you would take your own life. If not either, then still to continue to live an unhappy life in your present home."

"Ettie, why will you be blind? It is your duty to look to your own interests. Would you disobey your father any the more in marrying me against his will than by seeking death in the river to escape his injustice? You have no right to take the life God has given you to enjoy and make perfect. Instead, it is your duty to look to the future, and make your happiness as complete as earthly happiness can be. Your heart is your own. Your father does not—cannot know its desires. If he does, he heeds them not. He looks to his interests, and would sell you—sell you to further the—"

"Walter, you are right; I will marry you. I am ready to go with you from here this moment, if you would have me do so. You have opened my eyes."

"God bless you, Ettie, and may he curse me if I prove unworthy of your love."

Morris Norton, in his place of concealment, gnashed his teeth in silent rage.

"But," the detective added, "you say you fear force will be used against you. If that is the case no time is to be lost. We must marry as soon as possible. There is no other way. Once you are mine, then let him beware who would try to claim you," and a flame flashed for an instant in the detective's eyes—a flame that caused Morris Norton to recoil involuntarily.

"Oh! Walter, will it not be wrong to marry thus by stealth?"

"No, it will not. We love each other with a love divine, and it will be a sin almost for us to part. You are mine, Ettie, and I will run no risks of losing you. We must marry at once—to-morrow at the latest."

"But, how can we?—oh! how can we? I—"

"Ettie, listen: You must meet me here to-morrow at ten. In the mean time I will visit that good old dominie who lives in the little village a few miles from here. I have won his friendship; I will engage him to perform the ceremony. There shall be witnesses. Then I will take you to the home of Farmer Nelson, who also is my friend. But here is another plan, better still: You meet me at Farmer Nelson's house; I will engage the good old dominie to come there, and there we will be made one. There will be witnesses in plenty, and there you can remain, by your friend Kate, until I am ready to take you hence."

"Give me your answer, Ettie, oh! give me your answer, and let it be—Yes."

"But, to marry thus—"

"There is no other way, my darling; and once you are my wife, we will be all in all to each other," and he clasped her close.

She responded to his endearments, weeping silently.

"Give me your answer, Ettie."

"Oh! Walter, how can—"

"Do you not trust me, my darling? You have given me your heart—your love; you have promised to be mine, and still you hesitate. Will you not trust me?"

"Yes, yes, Walter, and to the very death. My heart, my love, my very life, is yours," she sobbed. "I will give myself to you, a king only love in return. I will be yours to death. In return, all I ask is—Love me! oh, love me!"

"And I do, Ettie; I love you now, and will love you forever."

"I believe you."

"And you will meet me to-morrow, as I have planned?"

"Yes, I will. I will meet you at Farmer Nelson's at ten o'clock to-morrow, and thenceforth I shall be yours forever, to do with me as you will. God forgive me if I do wrong, and may He forgive you if you prove false to me." And as she uttered the words she lifted her tearful, loving eyes to his.

"Amen to the last," said Burt, as he embraced her tenderly. "At this hour to-morrow you will be mine, and as I deal with you, my love, so may God deal with me."

A kiss sealed their vows.

"Go on, go on, my precious lovers!" Morris Norton almost hissed. "This is your last meeting on earth, so you may make the most of it. And you, my fiery beauty," he added in thought, "I'll take the silly nonsense out of you when once you are mine."

The interview lasted but a few minutes longer, and then the lovers parted, Ettie returning home alone.

Blue-Grass Burt began to gather up his "traps" and pack his outfit, and in a few minutes he was done. Then, with his knapsack upon his shoulders, he passed out into the old road and started up the hill.

As soon as he was out of sight, Morris Norton stepped out into the light beside the spring.

"Lucky for me it is," he said, half aloud, "that I happened here to-day. To-morrow the prize would have been lost to me forever."

"So, *this* is how matters stand, is it? Very well; now I will take a hand in the game, and this night, Walter Prince, *you die!*" And shaking his fist in the direction the artist detective had gone, he crossed the road and disappeared into the woods, making his way southward.

Blue-Grass Burt passed on over the hill, and made his way direct to Farmer Nelson's place. There he had a long conversation with the farmer and his wife, and the result was—they both agreed to lend their assistance in what he asked.

Having inquired concerning their daughter, the detective was invited in to see her.

"Have you called in the new doctor at Braddsbury?" he asked.

"No," the farmer answered, "we have not."

"I think I would do so, then," Burt advised. "He has done some good work in town, and I believe he is bound to become a successful physician."

"What is his name?"

"Let me see— I think I have some of his cards. Yes, here is one: 'Alphonso St. Eric, M. D.' He is to be found at the Open Door Hotel, or at his office, which I believe he opens to-day."

"Thank'e, stranger—or I should say, Mr. Prince; thank'e. I believe I'll send for him."

After spending a little time with the sick girl, chatting pleasantly and trying to encourage her to renewed hope, the artist-detective bade the family good-by and went away.

An hour later found him at the residence of the good old dominie we have seen him mention. Another long conversation was had there, which resulted, at last, in his winning the dominie to his cause.

Arrangements for the morrow were all made.

CHAPTER XXII.

COLONEL CASS'S BONANZA.

In telling Farmer Nelson that Alphonso St. Eric would that day open his office at Braddsbury, the Gold Star Detective was right. Such was the fact. And no common affair was that office to be, either.

Alphonso had some means, and having at last selected a town in which to locate meant to put forth every effort to insure his success.

He had bought a small house on the main street of the town, and had it altered and painted to his own taste. The main room on the ground floor was to be his office, nicely furnished, and another room just back of it his laboratory.

In this latter room, when he had done, were shelves upon shelves of bottles and jars—in fact, it was a veritable apothecary shop.

All this had not been done in a day. The young doctor had been hard at work at it for weeks.

He intended to live in the house, and had hired a colored man and his wife to assume the care of it. The man to look after his horse and wagon, and to attend to the yard and small garden, and the woman to cook and attend to the housework.

Alphonso meant to start off in style, sink or swim—as the fates should decide, and present appearances all went to indicate his success.

As Blue-Grass Burt had told the farmer, the young doctor had done some good work already, and this being the case, his practice was naturally increasing; and despite his airs and affected manners, his eye-glass and his drawl of speech, he was pretty generally liked.

Besides all this, he was the only doctor in the town; Dr. Lane, an old man of seventy years or more, having died just a few days previously to his coming.

The nearest opposition was the doctor who was attending Kate Nelson, and he lived in another town seven miles away.

Appearances, therefore, were all in favor of the young man's success.

On the morning of which we have just been writing, and about the same time when Blue-Grass Burt set out to keep his appointment with Ettie Winton, Alphonso called his colored man into his office and said:

"Sam, I want you to go—aw—to go down to the hotel, find Colonel Emmerly Cass, and request him to come here. Tell him—aw—that I desire to see him."

"Yes, sah."

"Tell him to come at once."

"Yes, sah."

"Well, that is all. • Be off with you."

The darky started, wondering what his master could want to see such a man as the colonel for.

In a short time he returned with the colonel at his heels, and showing him into the office, he was inclined to linger to hear what was to be said.

Alphonso promptly dismissed him, though, and then turning to the colonel, extended his hand and said:

"My deah colonel, how do you do?"

"Bully!" the colonel exclaimed, as he grasped the doctor's hand with a grip that made him wince; "bully, I thank 'e, doctor! but most infernally dry."

"Dry, my deah colonel?"

"Dry! I'm as dry as a bone. I'm so dry that my body threatens to crumble to dust."

"Can it be possible?"

"Can it! That is jest th' state I'm in, doctor, fer a fact."

"Too bad, colonel; it is, weally. Sit down."

The colonel sat, and taking off his hat, began to fan himself with it.

"And you are so vewy dwy, my deah colonel, weally?"

"Never was so dry in my life. Since Priscilla won't relent, and I've got no money and less credit, it seems to me there is a very Sahara in my stomach, with every cussed oasis dried up, and a parching simoom a-ragin' up and down and around th' desert regardlessly. Th' long and th' short of it is, doctor, I'm dry. I haven't had a single taste in almost twenty-four hours."

"Yesterday afternoon I tramped clear across th' hill to see Priscilla, to see if she wouldn't relent to th' extent of a dime, if no more; but I got there too late. Stonewall Jackson was loose for th' night, and I didn't dare to venture in."

"Ob! he's a holy rip-snortin' terror, is Stonewall, and— But, I believe you've made his acquaintance."

"Yes, aw—I believe I did."

"Well, he's jest as ferocious as ever."

"Well, my deah colonel, I don't like to see you suffer, I don't weally; but at the same time I must tell you candidly that I'm glad you are dwy."

"Blue skies above us!" the colonel exclaimed, "you're glad I'm dry! I counted you as my friend. I thought there was some feeling of pity in your breast, and that your mission was to alleviate th' sufferings of your fellow-men. Since you prove false, then who is to be trusted? Alas, alas, alas, al—"

"But, my deah colonel, did I not just say that I do not like to see you suffer?"

"Did you? Did you say that? Why, then, in heaven's name, do you not relieve me?"

"Just what I propose doing, my deah colonel; it is, weally."

"What! do you mean it?"

"Yes, I mean it."

"Oh! saints be praised. I feel that it is not all of life to live, my deah doctor; one must drink to make existence complete. Your words have caused my mouth to water in sweet anticipation."

"Yes, my deah colonel, I have sent for you for the express purpose of giving you a drink. In fact I will give you two drinks—three if you like."

"Oh! stars of th' firmament. This is too good to be true." And as he spoke the colonel glanced around the room to discover some tangible sign, some substantial evidence—or bottle for instance, that it was true.

"You doubt me, my deah colonel? Wait." And Alphonso stepped into his back room, returning in a moment with bottle and glass in hand.

"Ah! my life, my soul, my hope hereafter!" the colonel cried, starting up and stepping forward; "but this is a welcome sight."

"My deah colonel," said the young doctor, allow me to explain. I have just received some fine liquor, which I intend to use for medicinal purposes. I have tested it chemically, and find it all it is represented to be. But that does not satisfy me. I want some good judge of liquor to taste it, and then give me an honest opinion of it."

"Now, my deah colonel, who in all the world can—aw—can be a better judge of liquor than you?"

"Nobody!" the colonel cried out instantly. "There ain't a better judge o' rum in th' bull State, doctor, if I do say it myself. Why, I've put away barrels of it!"

"So I thought, my deah colonel, so I thought. Still, if you—aw—if you know of any one else—"

"Oh, but I don't, doctor. I assure ye I don't!"

"Very well then, my deah colonel, please taste of this and—aw—and let me know what you think of it."

And he put the bottle and glass into the colonel's hands.

The colonel took them, be assured, and filled the glass.

"Doctor, your health," he said.

And raising the glass to the light and squinting at it with one eye for a second, the next

moment it was—the liquor, of course—in his stomach.

"Well, my deah colonel," Alphonso inquired, "how is it?"

"By Heavens!" the colonel exclaimed, "I forgot to taste of it. I beg your pardon, doctor, a thousand times or more. With your permission, however, I will—"

"Certainly, my deah colonel, certainly. Fill up again."

The colonel obeyed.

"Well, doctor," he said, as he held the glass up to the light once more, "as far as th' looks is concerned, it is immense—truly immense. It has jest th' true shade o' color, and there isn't a dreg to be seen. It's as clear as—as—"

"As clear as water?"

"Well, er, really, doctor, I've almost fergot jest how water does look; but it's jest as clear as kin be. That's how it is fer looks."

"Thank you, my deah colonel, thank you. And now for the taste. Go—aw—go a little slow, you know, colonel."

"Yes, I'll bear that in mind. Well, doctor, your health again."

And throwing back his head, the colonel dashed the liquor down his throat the same as before.

Alphonso looked at him in surprise.

"But, my deah colonel," he remonstrated, "you—aw—you pwomised to go—aw—to go a little slow, don't ye know, and taste it."

"Wal, I'll be darned!" the colonel exclaimed, and he looked the picture of surprise. "Force of habit, ye see. Force of habit is a wonderful thing."

"It certainly seems to be."

"Wal, doctor, if you will kindly allow—"

"Certainly, certainly, my deah colonel. Try it again. I forgive you."

The colonel filled the glass once more, he never made any half-way job about that, and then the doctor put out his hand for the bottle.

The old toper surrendered it reluctantly.

"Now, my deah colonel," Alphonso said, "dwindle; and as you dwindle, taste."

"All right, doctor, all right. I'll try and bear it in mind this time. Wal, doctor, once more your health."

And back went his head and up went the glass.

Alphonso caught his arm.

"Slow—aw—my deah colonel; slow, you know. This is the last dwindle this time, don't ye know."

"Ah! pardon me. Force of habit is hard to overcome. Wal, now, to taste it."

And putting the glass to his lips, the colonel drank its contents slowly.

When he had done he put down the glass, wiped his mouth on his sleeve, and smiled a smile of satisfaction and contentment.

"Well, and how is it?" the young doctor asked.

"Doctor, it is bully. It is th' best stuff I have tasted in a dog's age. It beats anything that has struck this town in years, and there ain't anything at th' Open Door kin hold a candle to it."

"Ah! you please me, my deah colonel; you do indeed. I know the value of your opinion."

"Thank 'e, doctor, thank 'e. I mean jest what I said. It is almighty good stuff."

"Then you weally like it."

"Do! Ah! if I could have one or two good drinks of it daily, I would feel myself in th' seventh heaven. Oh! I love it, I love it. To me it is brain, muscle and life. Give me plenty of whisky, and I can live upon a pound of meat a week. Whisky is th' food for men, doctor; whisky is the food for men."

"But," he suddenly added, "ain't you goin' ter take any?"

"No, my deah colonel," Alphonso replied, "I do not dwindle."

"Then you do not live, my dear doctor; you merely exist. You do not know what life really is. Oh! but give me my—"

"Pardon me, deah colonel, but did I hear you remark that you would like to have a dwindle of this every day?"

"Oh! if I only might!"

"Well, my deah colonel, you may."

"W-what d'ye say?"

"I say you may have a dwindle—of this liquor every day."

The colonel could not believe the evidence of his senses.

"You're a-foolin', ain't ye?" he said.

"Indeed, no. I mean it. It is to be on certain conditions, however."

"O-oh!"

"Yes, my deah colonel, you must do something for me in return, you know."

"Name it, doctor, name it. If it is anything that human man kin do, I'll tackle it."

"Oh! it is a vewy simple thing, my deah colonel, weally. It is this. That you come here every morning and carry my letters to the post-office, when I have any to send; and be at the post-office at mail-time and bring my mail up to me. Will you do this?"

"Will I! Doc, I'm your huckleberry, every time!"

"Very well, then, it is agreed. You are to do what I have said, and in return I'm to give

you a dwink of this excellent liquor every time you call. Mind you, though, my deah colonel, you must not call too often. You must—aw—he weasonable, you know."

"Oh! certainly, certainly."

"All right, then. I will send word to the postmaster, and you can begin your work at mail-time to-day."

Alphonso wrote a note, addressed it to the postmaster of the town, and giving it, together with some letters, to the colonel, he dismissed him with a bow.

The colonel was so full of thanks that he could hardly tear himself away, but at length the doctor bowed him beyond the outer door, and he started.

Hastening down the main road to the first corner, the colonel turned, and as soon as he was out of sight from the doctor's house he stopped, leaned against a fence and laughed.

Long, loud and hearty was his laugh, and then he muttered:

"Oh! but this is rich—rich. Oh! what a pudding! Now I am happy and content. The present provided for, the future assured. Could mortal ask more?" And then, after one more laugh he returned to the main road and went to the post-office.

Little did the colonel dream of the snare that was set to ruin forever his appetite for strong drink, nor had he even the shadow of a suspicion.

Such, however, were the facts.

Alphonso St. Eric, M.D., had taken the first steps toward saving Colonel Emmerly Cass from a drunkard's grave.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A WONDERFUL CHANGE.

WHEN Ettie Winton reached home, after her interview with her lover, it was to be hailed with a volley of shot and shell from Jane Winton's scolding tongue.

"Ah-ha! Miss Somebody," Jane cried, "you are not home so soon, are you? Why did you not stay all day? I'm sure I would. There is nothing to be done here; oh! no, nothing at all! I can do it all myself. I am nobody. I can do everything myself; so there was no need for you to hurry so. You have only been gone four or five hours—only four or five hours, and I'm afraid you have hurried yourself too much. Are you not tired? Oh! I would not go to work now, if I were you; you must be tired, poor thing! Why do you not sit down?"

"Very well," said Ettie, coolly taking off again an apron which she had just put on, preparatory to taking hold with the house work, "very well; since you are so considerate, I will sit down. I have a little sewing to do, anyhow."

"You will sit down and sew, will you?" Jane Winton screamed, now having something to storm about. "Oh! will you? And leave me to do all the work, eh? Are you not satisfied, after being out all the forenoon? You will put on that apron, that's what you'll do, and you'll turn right to and make up for lost time. Are you not satisfied with what I do for you? Is it not enough that I have worked for you like a nigger and a slave ever since I came into the family? or must I keep right on? I think things are a little too much one-sided in this house, entirely, and there has got to be a change!" etc., etc.

"There is going to be a change," Ettie remarked, as soon as she could get in a word.

"There is going to be a change, is there? And what is it, pray?"

"I am going away."

"Oh! indeed! And where are you going to?"

"I will tell you. My father is urging me to marry, and I am going to obey him."

This news brought Jane to listening terms.

If Ettie had been undecided when with her lover, before he had won her final consent to his plans, she was more than ever decided now. Not another week would she remain in the same house with her step-mother, even if she had to run away and seek a home elsewhere. All she received was what she ate, and a place to sleep. She clothed herself, and more than repaid her father for all the expense she had ever been to him.

She did fully as much as did the step-mother herself, and being all the time under the lash of a scolding tongue was more than she could any longer stand.

"What!" Jane exclaimed in the greatest surprise, "you are going to marry?"

"Yes, I am."

"And when?"

"Just as soon as possible. I am ready even now. My father urges me to do so, and why put it off?"

"And have you told him so?"

"No; I have not seen him to-day. After getting breakfast ready I went out, you know, and was not here when he got up, and when I came in he had eaten and gone."

"Yes, true enough, but why have you changed your mind so suddenly?"

"I will tell you that, too. It is because I am tired of living in the same house with you. Any life is preferable to the life I am leading here."

Jane Winton fairly turned blue.

"What do you mean?" she gasped.

"I will tell you that also," Ettie responded. And then, hastening on while there was a chance of being listened to, she said:

"For many years, Jane Winton, I have tried to love you as it is my duty to do, and have done all in my power to win your love in return. It has been a useless task. I find it is an impossibility. My very first recollections of you are of cruel treatment and abuse. I was always forced to do work of some sort, while your own children were at play. If I tried to steal away for a moment to join them at their games I was called back and punished. No matter what went wrong, the blame was always put upon me. If I tried to explain, a slap in the face closed my mouth. Your story would be the only one my father would hear, and he, in order to quiet your tongue, would punish me blindly as often as you could desire. Then if I said a word to him you would punish me again."

"Ettie Winton!" Jane cried, pale with rage, "you—"

"Hear me out," Ettie interrupted. "You have crushed every spark of love I ever had for you. Still, to do my duty I have gone on and on, almost uncomplainingly, until now. Your scolding tongue has caused me many an hour of pain, and drives my father to spend his evenings in the hotel. You make life miserable for all who are near you. I did not intend to speak thus when I came in, but you set upon me at once, and as my time beneath this roof is drawing to a close, I resolved to tell you just what is true."

"Had you been kind to me, instead of harsh and cruel, I would have loved you—loved you as I would have loved my own dear mother; but you were not. And, even if I did not intend to obey my father and marry, I would leave this house and seek a home among entire strangers."

"You may be thankful that you have been spared to see your children grow up to their present age, and they should bless God that they have a mother. An orphan's lot is a sad one at best; mine has been doubly sad."

Here Ettie broke down and wept. She had intended to say a great deal more, but found it impossible to do so. It was not her nature to complain, and already she felt sorry for having said what she had.

When she looked up, which she soon did, for, strange to say, Jane uttered not a word; she was surprised to see tears in that woman's eyes. Her last words had brought them.

Ettie's youngest half-sister, little Grace, was a cripple, and was the favorite. She was the nearest like Ettie in disposition, and was her mother's best-loved child; and Jane's thoughts had turned to her at once. She put her for the moment in Ettie's place. Would any woman have the heart to treat her child as she had treated Ettie? Had she not been cruel to Ettie in a hundred ways? Would her child—her favorite child—ever be left in a like position?

With these thoughts came the tears.

Seeing her step-mother weeping, Ettie's heart was touched instantly, and dropping upon her knees before her, she caught her hands and cried:

"Forgive me! Oh! forgive me for my words. I should not have spoken."

Jane now sobbed aloud. Her conscience was already pricking her with a thousand stings, and now came the deepest cut of all.

Clasping Ettie in her arms she said:

"Ettie, why did you not speak to me years ago as you have this moment? You have opened my eyes, and have changed my heart. I love you, Ettie, but I have been blind with jealousy. Oh! if you can, forgive me." And letting fall her head, she sobbed aloud.

Presently she looked up and said:

"Ettie, from this moment I am a new woman. I shall try to imitate your own patience, and try to make up in the future for what I have done in the past. Ettie, my child—my own child now, kiss me, and let us be friends."

Ettie threw herself into her step-mother's arms instantly. For years her soul had been thirsting for these very words, and now that they were spoken at last, the past was forgiven in a moment.

"And you really intend to marry, do you, Ettie?" Jane inquired after a time.

"Yes," Ettie answered, with eyes cast down, "I have fully decided to do so."

In saying she had resolved to obey her father and marry, Ettie spoke the truth so far as she spoke at all; but she was far from saying she intended to marry Morris Norton.

"But," said Jane, "you do not love Morris Norton."

"No, I do not."

"Could you ever learn to love him?"

"No."

"Then why throw your life away?"

"My father—"

"Your father is blind!" Jane cried. "He has not told me anything, but my belief is that Morris Norton has some power over him, though what it is I can't imagine. But that has nothing to do with it. He has no right to sell you to serve his own interests."

At these words Ettie again burst into tears.

The very words of her lover, almost, and from so unexpected a source.

"If I were you," Jane went on, "I would marry the man I love, or I would marry none."

Ettie looked up instantly.

"Oh! you need not think that I am blind," Jane added. "I can see that you love that young artist who is staying at the hotel, and it is the talk of the town that he is in love with you. What else is keeping him here all these weeks?"

Ettie turned her eyes to the floor, making no reply.

"You need not answer," Jane went on, "for no answer is needed. I can see it all. And, if I were you, Ettie, I would not hesitate to marry him if chance offered. Mark my words, any life will be better than life with Morris Norton. Do not marry him, Ettie, even if you have to run away to escape it."

At that moment Abel Winton was seen approaching the house.

"Quick! get to your room!" Jane cried. "Here comes your father, and he is in liquor. I will tell him nothing. Kiss me, my child, and forgive the past if you can. Now, go!"

Ettie hastened from the room, and a moment later Abel entered.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ABEL WINTON'S STRUGGLE.

WHEN Abel Winton entered the house it was plain to be seen, as his wife had said, that he was "in liquor."

He had certainly been drinking, but he was not drunk. He had just enough of the fiery monster inside to make him desperate.

Much to his surprise, he found his wife singing, and stopping short he looked at her in astonishment.

Was he dreaming? It seemed not, and yet—could this be Jane Winton? Why did she not turn upon him and let loose her tongue as usual?

"Say," he presently demanded, "ain't sick, are ye?"

"No, Abel, of course not," Jane replied.

"What'n thunder is wrong, then?"

"Nothing." And Jane laughed. She well understood what was meant.

It may seem strange that such a woman as Jane Winton has been shown to be, could change her manner so suddenly and so completely. There is nothing strange about it. A querulous woman is not her natural self, and she can, if she will, be as pleasant and agreeable as any one. So it was with Jane Winton. Ettie had opened her eyes, touched her heart, and wrought a change in her in a moment. Now, if she would, she could continue in the new path she had just entered upon, for life.

"Well," Abel said, soberly, "I think there is something wrong. No matter, though," he added, "don't say a word."

And taking a pencil from his pocket, he stepped across to the chimney-jamb and made a mark, adding:

"Don't say a word."

Jane could hardly help giving him a "piece of her mind" but when he turned around his face was as sober as ever, and she had to laugh.

"No," she resolved, "I will fight it out now, and see what will come of it. I will scold no more."

"Don't say a word," Abel repeated, "don't say a word."

Jane threw herself upon a chair and laughed long and loudly.

"Well, I'll be eternally jiggered!" Abel exclaimed, "if this don't beat all. Don't say a word, though; don't say a word."

"Sit down, Abel, sit down," Jane said, pleasantly.

Abel did so.

"Abel," Jane then said, "you are surprised to find me not complaining for once."

"Surprised! Jane, I'm paralyzed."

"Well, I shall complain no more. You have heard me 'jaw' for the last time."

This was said pleasantly, and Abel could only sit and stare at his wife in utter amazement.

"Yes," she went on, "it is true."

"Well, I only hope it is, Jane. God knows home has been anything but a heaven, of late years."

Tears filled the woman's eyes.

"And for that reason," she said, "you have taken to spending your evenings at the Open Door, where you have—have—"

"Found peace and quiet and jolly companions? Yes, Jane, you're right."

"And—where you—"

"Have taken to drink? Exactly. I'm in a fair way to goin' to the old cuss, I guess."

"Oh! my God, Abel, do not say that."

"That's just the fact, Jane."

"Oh! pray stay away from there, then, Abel. You have heard my intentions, Abel, and I mean what I said. Please say that you will stay away from the hotel."

And the woman fell upon her knees at her husband's feet, weeping.

"Well, Jane, I promise. And I'll keep my word as long as you keep yours, too. There—there, now, get up."

"And, Abel, one thing more."

"Well."

"Release Ettie from marrying Morris Norton."

For the moment this had been absent from Abel's mind.

"My God!" he cried, springing to his feet and clasping his head in his hands, "you bring all the hell of my thoughts back to me again. Oh! if I only could release her and defy him—if I only could!"

"And why can you not?"

"Oh! do not ask me, do not ask me. Where is she?"

"She is in her room."

"Call her down here. I want to see her."

Jane obeyed, and Ettie soon came down.

She found her father in tears.

"Ettie, my child," he said, "do you love me?"

"Of course I do, papa," Ettie replied, throwing her arms around his neck.

"And you would save me from shame and disgrace if it lay in your power?"

"Yes, and willingly."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes. I would give my very life to save yours, if it were necessary. It would be my duty to do so, if—if—"

"If what?"

"If the cause were a just one."

"Oh! my God, my God!" And Abel let fall his head upon his hands, sobbing aloud.

Wife and daughter were upon their knees before him in an instant. For the first time they realized that something terrible was hidden in the husband and father's breast. What could it be?

"Fool, fool that I have been!" Abel cried.

"Oh! miserable coward that I am! And yet—"

"Oh! my God, my God!"

"Oh, father!" Ettie cried, "what is it that troubles you? Speak to us, oh! speak to us and tell us all."

"Oh! I cannot, I cannot."

"Are you in trouble?"

"Am I in trouble! My God, I am in actual hell!"

The two women were seriously alarmed.

"But, father," Ettie insisted, "can you not tell us all? Can you not trust us—your wife and daughter?"

"Yes—yes, I can trust you, but I cannot tell you."

"And why not?" Jane asked.

"It is impossible, Jane, impossible."

"And do you say that I can save you—that I can remove your trouble?" Ettie queried.

"Yes, Ettie, my child, yes. You, and you alone, can save me."

"And how can I save you?"

"By marrying Morris Norton."

Ettie uttered a groan, and fell back upon the floor as pale as death. She had fainted.

"My God! I have killed her!" Abel cried, springing to his feet.

"No, no," said Jane, "she has only fainted." And she hastened to get some water.

In a short time Ettie returned to consciousness.

"Where am I?" she gasped.

"You are here, at home," Jane answered, kindly.

"And what has happened? I— Oh! I remember now!" And having caught sight of her father's haggard face, it all came back to her.

Abel stood with hands clinched and lips compressed. A terrible struggle was going on within his breast. Here, just as things had changed as he would have them—as he had longed to have them: his wife and daughter at peace, and he and Jane understanding each other as they never had before; here, he himself was forced to mar it all.

But could he help it? Was not his very life in peril? Still, all might yet be well, for had not Morris Norton promised faithfully to love and cherish Ettie tenderly? And if he did this, would she not learn to love him in time? Above all, was Morris not rich? and would not many another girl in the town be glad to get him if she could?

Being forced to obey Morris Norton, he looked at that side in its brightest light, and crushing down all other feelings, he presently said:

"Ettie, you heard what I said?"

"Yes, father, I heard."

"Well, what do you say?"

"I must say now, as I have said before, that I can never marry Morris Norton."

"Ettie, you must marry him."

"Why must I?"

"Because, as I have just been weak enough to tell you, he has me in his power, and he will not release me until you become his wife."

"And you would sell me to him—me, your own child?"

"You would consent readily if you knew all."

"Well, I certainly must know all, then, for you may be sure I shall never consent without."

"Very well, then you shall know all."

Jane Winton, now, was gazing at Ettie in surprise. Had she not, only a few minutes ago, said that she intended to obey her father?

and marry? Why, then, did she refuse to obey now?

"It must be that my actions and words have caused her to change her mind," she thought.

Abel was as pale as death, but now firmly resolved.

Ettie stood before him, leaning against a chair and silently weeping.

"Ettie," Abel said, after a pause, "suppose my life were at stake, and by marrying Morris Norton you could save me; would you do so?"

"In such a case I would be duty-bound to obey you."

"That is all I want to hear. Now listen to me."

"Morris Norton will come here this evening. I shall be at home. Jane, you and the children must go out for an hour. And you, Ettie, you shall learn why you must—positively must marry that man."

Without another word, then, Abel Winton turned and left the house.

"What, oh! what can he mean?" Ettie cried, bursting into tears anew.

"It is more than I can understand, I must confess," Jane admitted.

"How can Morris Norton have such a hold upon father?"

"I do not know."

"And he says I must marry him. Oh! I cannot, I cannot do it!"

"But," said Jane, "did you not tell me only a short time ago, that you intended to obey your father, and marry?"

"Yes, so I said."

"And now you refuse."

"Yes, to marry Morris Norton, I do."

"What, then, did you mean?"

"What I meant then I mean now. That I intend to obey him and marry, but not Morris Norton."

"Not him? Then—"

"I am going to marry Walter Prince, the artist."

"You are! When?"

"To-morrow."

"Good heavens!"

"It is true."

"Well, of all things!" Jane could but ejaculate.

"Yes," Ettie repeated, "it is true. I have promised to marry him, and to marry him to-morrow. Will you keep my secret if I tell you all?"

"Yes, my child, I will."

Throwing her arms around her step-mother again, Ettie sobbed.

"Oh! how sweet it is to trust and love you—for I do love you now. If we could only have lived always thus. You will forgive me for all I have said and done?"

"Ask not my forgiveness, Ettie, but let me beg yours. You are to me now what I have never realized before."

After a few minutes Ettie was able to speak again, and then she told her story without reserve.

"And now, mother, you know all," she concluded. "Advise me, oh! advise me what to do."

For some time Jane was silent.

At length she said:

"Ettie, I am older than you, and have seen more of the world. Under ordinary circumstances my advice would certainly be against a secret marriage. As it is, though, no choice is left to you. You must either obey your father, or you must disobey him; and to obey him means to bind yourself to Morris Norton for life. Any fate is to be welcomed in preference. How can you escape? The way is open, and my advice is—marry the man you love."

"Oh! thank you, thank you!" Ettie cried. "Now I feel that I am doing no wrong. But," she suddenly added, "what can my father's secret be?"

"That you shall learn to-night, no doubt."

"Yes, no doubt. My course is decided upon, though. Nothing can turn me from my purpose now. Only to save my father's very life would I renounce my present intention and marry Morris Norton."

Poor Ettie! little she dreamed of the terrible revelation soon to be made.

CHAPTER XXV. ANOTHER CLEW.

ALONG in the afternoon of the same day, a wagon stopped at the house of Alphonso St. Eric, M. L.

It was a wagon from Farmer Nelson's place.

The young doctor was in his office at the time, and promised to respond to the call at once.

Having done his errand, the man drove away, and Alphonso ordered his horse and carriage out at once, and in a short time was on his way to the farmer's house.

When he reached his destination he was welcomed in true country style, and after a few moments was conducted to the sick-room.

The moment he entered and saw Kate Nelson, he said:

"Show me the medicine this young lady is taking, if—aw—if you please."

The bottles were brought forth and surrendered.

Alphonso smelled and tasted of their contents one after another, and then pushed them away from him with the remark:

"Wrong, wrong."

"What dy'e say?" Farmer Nelson inquired.

"I say your doctor is wrong. He has not—aw—has not made a correct diagnosis of the case."

"W-what do you say it is, sir?" asked Mrs. Nelson.

"Well, my dear madam, it is not a case of consumption, of that I can assure you."

"And can you cure her? Oh! say that you can."

"I believe I can, madam."

"Then do so, and my blessing shall be yours."

"Do you desire me to take the case, sir?" Alphonso inquired of the farmer.

"Yes, stranger—er, I should say doctor; we do."

"Very well, then. In the first place, then, aw—you must throw out all of this," indicating the bottles; "and then you—aw—you must dismiss the other physician, you know. On these conditions I will take the case in hand, and I believe I can restore your daughter to health."

"God bless you if you can!" Mrs. Nelson said fervently.

The young doctor prepared some medicines, gave careful directions, and then took his leave.

"I will call to-morrow at ten," he said as he drove away.

Ten o'clock on the morrow, it will be remembered, was the hour set for the wedding of Ettie Winton and the young artist.

Instead of returning home at once, Alphonso told his colored man to drive to the farm of Miss Priscilla Cass, and thither they went.

Drawing up at the gate, Alphonso got out and entered the yard.

Barely had he advanced half a dozen steps when a low growl reminded him that Stonewall Jackson was around.

With almost a single bound the young doctor placed his corporal avoirdupois outside the gate, which he shut with a bang.

And then he shouted:

"Miss Cass! Miss Cass!"

Priscilla had seen him, and now appeared at the door.

"Ah! there you are!" Alphonso exclaimed. "I was calling to ask you whether the dog is tied."

"Oh! is it you, doctor?" Priscilla cried, coming down toward the gate. "Yes, the dog is tied; come right in."

"Aw—I do not like your dog, you know," Alphonso explained, as he ventured in once more. "He is too—aw—too familiar on short acquaintance, don't ye know."

Priscilla laughed.

"Yes, he is so," she admitted. "And I am so sorry for the way in which he used you that night you came here to inquire your way. I can never forgive myself, although I could hardly be blamed, either; for I had put up a notice at the end of the lane—'Beware of the Dog.'"

"Oh, it was no fault of yours, my dear Miss Cass, believe me. It wasn't weally. I should have been more cautious."

"Well, since it cannot be helped now, we will let it pass. You will come in, of course?"

"Yes, I shall be delighted to, weally."

"And I shall be delighted to have you do so. Come right in." And she led the way.

"Where have you been?" she asked, when she had seated her caller and had taken a chair herself.

"I have been over to Farmer Nelson's."

"Indeed! have they called you to attend their daughter?"

"Yes."

"Poor girl! I fear she will never be well."

"Then—aw—then you do not think very highly of my skill as a physician."

"Oh, it is not that I mean. You know consumption is considered as incurable, though, and of course you cannot hope to do what is impossible."

"Certainly not. But, Miss Cass, the young lady has not that disease. Her ailment is something entirely different, and I am sure I can cure her. But let us change the subject. I have also taken your father under my charge."

"Oh! I am glad to hear that. And do you hope to cure him?"

"I certainly do."

"But, how in the world did you get him to consent?"

"Oh, he consented willingly—even gladly."

"And does he take his medicine as you direct?"

"Yes, he takes his medicine regularly, I assure you. Oh, yes, he takes his medicine *weally* regularly; he does, weally. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why do you laugh?"

"I laugh to think how *eager* he is to take it regularly. He will not miss a single dose if he can help it, you may be sure. Oh, no, you may be sure he won't. Ha, ha, ha!"

"It must be very amusing to you, doctor."

"Yes, it is indeed. It is so very funny that

you will have to laugh yourself when I tell you."

"Tell me, then, I pray you. If you are so confident that you can cure my poor father, I am sure it will do no harm for me to laugh with you over the means you employ."

"Very sensibly said, Miss Cass, weally."

"And if you can—if you do cure him, I shall owe you a debt of gratitude that I can never hope to repay."

"Oh! do not tell me that. I intend to ask a great reward, 'tis true; but still I am not without hopes that you will give me what I ask."

"But, let me not discuss that now. I must tell you the means I am employing to attain them end we have in view."

"I sent for your father this morning, Miss Cass, and requested him to—aw—to come to my office. He came. Then followed one of the most remarkable conversations I ever had in my life. I had all I could do to keep from laughing. I had, weally. I do not remember it all just now, but it was *wevery* remarkable, weally."

"I asked your father if he would like—aw—like to have a dwink, and he assured me that he would. He said he was *wevery* dwy. I gave him the liquor, and instead of taking one dwink he took three. Oh! he is a most remarkable drinker, weally."

"But, how can you hope to cure him when you begin by encouraging his appetite?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Alphonso laughed. "Oh! that is just the joke of it all, ye know. Ha, ha, ha!" And again he laughed.

"Well, tell me all."

"Yes, pardon me. Well, the whole thing in a nutshell is, I have—aw—have engaged your father to bring my mail up from the post-office every day, and to call at my office each morning to see if I have any letters to post; and for remuneration for this service I am to give him a good dwink of liquor every time he calls."

"Doctor!"

"Fact, I assure you."

"But, how in the world can you ever hope to cure him in that way?"

"Ah! my dear Miss Cass, do you not understand? Then I will explain: In every dwink of liquor your father takes will be some *wevery* powerful medicines, and—"

"Oh! I see, I see! And he will keep on and on until—"

"Until he will suddenly become very ill, Miss Cass, and will have to be brought home. He will remain ill about a week, and then he will recover rapidly. He will soon be well, and then he will crave for a drink. You will give him one—"

"Not I, sir!"

"Ah! well, it does not matter. He will get one somehow, and it will be his last. He may venture to twy it again, but if he does he will never twy a third time. All liquor will be to him as nauseous as—as—well, as nauseous as castor oil is to most people."

"And that is your cure. Oh, if you can only succeed!"

"Ah! I shall succeed, never fear. The main thing is, to have the patient take the medicine regularly; and if your father misses a single dose, it will be no fault of his."

Half an hour or so they talked pleasantly, and then Alphonso arose to depart. Priscilla urged him to call again, which the young doctor promised to do, and then getting into his wagon, he started for home.

Just as his wagon turned out of the lane into the old road, Walter Prince the artist came along. He was just returning to town after his visit to the dominie.

"Stop, Sam!" Alphonso cried, the moment he saw the artist. And then he added: "Mr. Prince, won't you ride?"

"Don't keer 'f do, as they say here in Kentucky," the detective responded. And putting his outfit in first, he climbed in and took a seat beside the young doctor.

They chatted pleasantly as they rode along, and presently the detective inquired:

"You smoke, do you not, doctor?"

"Yes," Alphonso replied, "I smoke a little, Mr. Prince."

"Have a cigar, then," and as he spoke, Burt extended his case.

Alphonso took one, and taking out one for himself, the detective returned the case to his pocket.

Burt always cut the end of a cigar, instead of biting it off, as is generally the way; and just as he put his hand into his pocket to get his knife, the horse gave a sudden jump and almost pitched him and Alphonso from the seat. Burt's hand flew out of his pocket instantly, and with it came some small object which dropped into the bottom of the wagon.

Alphonso chanced to see it, and when they had recovered their balance once more, called the detective's attention to it.

It proved to be only a button, but it was the one which Burt had found on the ground near where Amos Norman's body had been found.

"Only a button," Burt said, as he picked it up, and he held it up for his companion to see; "it is one I found. Odd-shaped, isn't it?"

Alphonso took it in his hand.

"Why," he exclaimed, "I think I can tell you who lost this."

"You can?" and Burt tried hard not to show the sudden interest he felt.

"Yes."

"Well, who was it? I can return it, you know."

"It belongs to Miss Priscilla Cass's hired man, Beriah Simms; or at least he wears an old coat with buttons just like this, and I have noticed that one is missing."

Burt passed the matter lightly, but his thoughts were busy. Was this a new clew to that dark crime? He meant to know ere many days.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PUT TO THE TEST.

At an early hour that evening Morris Norton called at Abel Winton's house. Abel was at home, and Ettie was in her room.

Jane and the other girls were out.

"Well," Norton queried, as Abel admitted him, "what is the word?"

"The same as ever," Abel replied.

"Still refuses, eh?"

"Yes."

"Then we shall have to see what can be done with her. Where is she?"

"She is in her room."

"Call her down, then. We may as well have it out first as last."

"You need not give any orders in my house, Morris," said Abel, who felt his position only too keenly. "I know what is to be done, and I am ready to do my part. You attend to yours."

"Have a care how you talk, Abel Winton. Remember the hand I hold!"

"I care not what your hand is. You are going too far when you attempt to bully me here. We have made a bargain, and I shall try to carry out my part of it. If I fail—well, if I fail I shall defy you. This will end it all," and as he uttered the words Abel drew a knife and held it uplifted above his own breast.

Norton smiled.

"Oh, well," he said, "that will make no particular difference to me, if I find I can't win the prize; for it will be either that or—" and he indicated hanging.

Abel turned pale, but he answered firmly:

"If the worst comes it will be the knife, and by my own hand."

"Just as you please; it is death either way, and you know my terms."

"Yes, I know. Now get that devilish expression off your face, if you can, and I will call my daughter down."

"Call her, by all means. Just what I bade you do at first. I'll be all smiles the moment she enters, I assure you."

Abel felt that it would be almost a pleasure to drive the knife he still held in his hand to its very hilt in the breast of the man before him. He was in a desperate mood.

Putting the knife away, though, he stepped out into the hall and called to Ettie to come down.

The girl answered that she would, and in a few moments she obeyed.

When she entered the room she was very pale, but her face bore an expression of determination.

She bowed slightly to Morris Norton, and took a seat near her father.

Morris had started up when she entered, and he smiled and bowed most gallantly.

"Ettie," said her father, "Mr. Norton has something to say to you. Please give him your attention, and remember my wishes."

Ettie inclined her head.

"Miss Winton," said Norton, then, "I love you. I have your father's consent, and I desire you to become my wife. I will care for you, and love you ever and always. You shall live the life of a lady—your every wish shall be granted. Will you marry me?"

"I will not."

The answer was firmly spoken.

"Ettie," said the father, "it is my wish that you marry this man."

"Forgive me, father; in this I cannot obey you."

"Your father is in danger, Ettie, and you alone can save him."

"What is the danger?"

"It is a deadly peril."

"What is it?"

"His very life is at stake."

"That cannot be!"

"It is true."

"And I can save him?"

"Yes; you, and you alone, can save him."

Ettie looked from one to the other in a frightened manner.

"Explain yourself," she next said. "Let me know all."

"Will you marry me, Ettie Winton, if by so doing you can actually save your father's life?"

"Yes, I will!"

"Then you are mine. By marrying me you will save him."

Ettie listened like one in a dream. She could not realize that she had heard aright.

"Father," she demanded, "is this true?"

"It is."

"How can it be—oh, how can it be?" she girl cried. "Tell me all, I beg of you!"

"Will you not take your father's word and mine that it is true? The explanation will be painful to you."

"I care not how painful it is! Tell me all—everything, and at once!"

"Very well; I will do so. Some weeks ago, the body of a man was found on the hill a few miles from here. It is supposed that he was murdered. No clew, however, has been found, except—"

"But what has *this* to do with my father? What has it to do with my marrying you, Morris Norton?"

"It has *all* to do with him—and you, for unless you marry me, Ettie Winton, your father will be hanged for the murder of Charles Carnsworth, or, to use his true name, Amos Norman, the Government detective."

"Oh, my God—my God!" Ettie cried, springing to her feet and wringing her hands. "Father, is this true? Oh, is it true? Tell me, tell me!"

"It is true."

Abel Winton uttered the words in a voice so hollow that it sounded almost unearthly.

Ettie sprang back from him with a cry of horror.

"A murderer—you?" she cried. Oh, say it is not true! I cannot, *will* not believe it! My father a murderer—*never!*"

Abel looked up instantly.

"Thank God, you believe in my innocence!" he exclaimed.

"Then you *are* innocent? Oh, say that you are!"

"Yes, Ettie, I am as innocent of murder as you are!"

"How, then, has this man this power over you? Why is your life in danger?"

"Listen to me," said Norton, "and I will tell you all—plainly and in few words. I have found, by chance, a clew to this murder, where detectives have found nothing. I found this chain upon the very ground where the crime was committed. And as he spoke he took from his pocket the watch-chain he had found."

"Heavens! father, it is *yours!*"

"I know it, I know it only too well," Abel groaned.

"And how came it where it was found?"

"I lost it there."

"When—how?"

"My child, I was at that murdered man's side when he died."

"Yes," Norton quickly added, "and he had a desperate struggle with the dying man. He had such a struggle, in fact, that his watch-chain was broken and lost, and his clothes became covered with blood. When the man fell back dead, your father became frightened. In terror he fled from the spot, and remained concealed in the woods all day. Late at night he came home; had an excuse for burning his clothes—perhaps you remember that, and—"

"Yes, yes, I remember the night."

"Well, that is all, except this chain; and this, if given to the detectives, will lead them direct to your father's door, and he will be arrested. Once arrested, all else will come out, and as surely as the heavens bend above us he will be hanged for the crime."

Poor Ettie was terrified.

"My God!" she gasped, "father is this true?"

"It is, it is."

"But, you are innocent—oh! tell me again that you *are* innocent."

"Ettie, I am innocent. I swear to you that I am innocent."

"Yes," Norton added, "your father is an innocent man, as I honestly believe. But, can he prove it?"

"Oh! my father, can you not prove that you are innocent?"

"Alas! I can not."

"You see what a desperate position he is in, Ettie, and now it is for you to say whether you will save him or not. Marry me, and I will return this chain to your father and keep his secret forever. Refuse, and as surely as I live I will deliver the chain to the Government detectives and tell them what I know."

"You can save your father's life, or you can send him to the gallows. It is for you to say which you will do."

With a groan Ettie fell fainting to the floor.

Abel Winton flashed his knife from its place of concealment and sprang forward at Norton like an enraged tiger.

Seeing his danger, Norton sprang aside, and the next instant a revolver gleamed in his hand.

"Back!" he cried, "back, or I fire!"

Abel fell back.

"You see I am prepared for you, Abel, so beware."

"My God!" Abel gasped, "what was I about to do! No, no, it must not be. If blood must stain my hand it shall be my own."

"That's a sensible idea."

"Heavens! man, have you no pity? Have you no heart—no soul?"

"Yes, I have both. I have some common sense, too. Can you not see that we have carried our point—that we have *won*? You are

now safe. Ettie will marry me, I will keep your secret, and all will be well.

"Show yourself a man, now, Abel Winton, and finish your task. Dash some water into Ettie's face to bring her to."

"Better for her if she never opens her eyes on earth again."

"You are a fool!"

"And *you*—you are a heartless villain!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Perhaps I am, Abel, but I am not afraid of the gallows—a hunted man."

"Would to God you could be in my position for one minute—only one."

"If I were, I would be making every effort to save my life, by making my daughter marry the man who loves her, who loves her so that he does not hesitate to employ any means within his power to win her."

"Abel, it is nonsense—it is *worse* than nonsense for you to hesitate. I love your daughter, and I will strive to make her happy. In time she will learn to love me. Do not force me to carry out my threat, when peace, quiet and safety are yours at so little cost."

"But, Morris, of what value will my child be to you if she does not love you?"

"She will learn to love me, I tell you, she will learn to love me."

"But," Abel still persisted, "suppose she loves another. It may be that her heart is not hers—that her troth is already plighted."

By this it will be understood that Norton had not told Abel of what he had seen and heard that day. In fact, this was the first time he had seen Abel since.

Norton smiled at the words, a deep-meaning smile that was full of cunning and evil. He was thinking of a deep plot he had laid to entice Walter Prince into a death-trap.

At that moment Ettie who had been lying where the cool evening air fanned her face, began to revive.

"In that case, Abel," Norton made reply to the last argument, "I will win her love in spite of him. But, you need have no fears on *that* score, I think."

Again that sinister smile.

"Well," he added, "what are you going to do? Are you going to help me, now that the case is almost ours? or are you going to risk your life for a young girl's foolish whims? Now is the time for you to decide, for she is coming to."

"I am with you," Abel answered, decidedly. "My daughter shall be yours if I can bring her to obey me in the matter."

"Very good. Now to win our fight."

CHAPTER XXVII.

ETTIE WINTON'S REPLY.

THE foregoing scene had taken place in a room where there was no danger of being seen, and little danger of being overheard.

Abel Winton had taken every precaution to guard against both.

The windows, open at the top, were closed and curtained below, and the conversation had been carried on in guarded tones, Ettie Winton realizing the importance of the caution she saw her father display.

Seeing that Ettie was returning to consciousness, Abel knelt down beside her and bathed her face with water, and she soon opened her eyes and glanced around the room.

Instantly, at sight of Morris Norton, she recalled all that had taken place.

As soon as she could she sat up, and then Abel assisted her to a chair.

"Father," she presently spoke, "is what I have heard true?"

"My child, again I assure you it is."

"And is there no hope—no chance for you to prove yourself innocent of this terrible crime?"

"There is no chance whatever, so far as I can see, for every circumstance is against me. And there is but one hope."

"And that is—"

"That is—*you*. You can save me, or you can send me to the gallows."

"Oh! this is horrible, horrible."

"Yet it is the plain truth," said Norton. "Marry me, Ettie Winton, and your father shall be free."

"And if I do not?"

"He shall hang—I swear it!"

"And you say you love me?"

"Love you! I worship you."

"Morris Norton, you lie."

"What!"

"I say that you lie. You do *not* love me."

"Why do you say that? I love you so well that I am bound to win you at all risks. I would lay down my very life for you."

"There is not a word of truth in what you say. If you loved me, would you cause me the pain you do? Would you threaten my father with death?"

"No other course is left to me. You have refused all my advances, and now I must stoop to this to win you."

"And if you do win me, what will you possess? I never cared for you, Morris Norton; of late I have despised you; and now—now I *hate* you. Why, then, will you force me to marry you?"

"Because I know that in time you will learn to love me."

"Never! I hate you now, and I shall hate you forever."

"No, no, Ettie, you will learn to love me in time, I know you will. I shall be so true—so devoted to you, that you will learn to love me in spite of yourself."

"Ettie, my darling," and he advanced toward her, "I—"

"Back!" the girl cried, "stand back, Morris Norton!" and she sprung to her feet and retreated from him.

"But, Ettie, you—"

"Keep away from me, I tell you, and sit down. I have something to say to both of you."

Norton resumed his seat.

"Father," said Ettie, then, "you have assured me that you are innocent of that crime and I believe you. Tell me now the whole story in all its particulars."

Abel did so, repeating his story in much the same words he had used when he first told it to Morris Norton.

Ettie listened attentively to the very end.

When her father had done she turned to Norton and said:

"Morris Norton, I believe as you say you believe, that my father speaks the truth. I believe that he is as innocent as I am."

"That is what I certainly believe," Norton returned. "I would not care to marry the daughter of a murderer."

"Do not fear. You are not in any danger of doing so."

The perfect coolness Ettie now displayed astonished the two men beyond measure. Did she mean to refuse? and Abel Winton's soul grew sick for the instant at the thought; or did she merely thus affirm her belief of her father's innocence?

Ettie soon set them right.

"Do not fear," she repeated, "for whether my father be innocent or guilty, I shall never marry you!"

Morris Norton was too surprised to speak. He had thought the game all but won, and now, having played his best card, he saw that he had lost. He saw it as clearly then as he realized it afterward.

"By heavens! girl, you shall marry him!" Abel exclaimed, and he spoke so loudly that his voice might have been heard by any one without.

"Hush!" Norton cautioned, "be more careful how you speak, if you value your safety."

"Be quiet, father, and listen to what I have to say."

"Yes, yes, my child, my dutiful child, send me to the gallows."

"Father, your fears have unmanned you. You are not yourself. Listen to me. I— First, though, Morris Norton," turning to him, "let me ask you a question."

"Certainly."

"The day the body of that man was found was a stormy one. The wind was blowing furiously, and the rain was falling heavily. How was it that you were abroad on the hill on such a day?"

Norton was greatly disturbed by the question, but he answered firmly:

"I had been out of town all night and was returning at an early hour of the forenoon, as I have told you already."

"Where had you been?"

"Well, I cannot tell you that. If it becomes necessary, though, I can explain it to the satisfaction of court and jury."

"Yes, no doubt."

"Of course there is no doubt. Do you imagine for a moment that I would press your father as I am doing if I could not account for myself?"

"It would not seem reasonable. Here is one question more, however: How came you to turn aside from the path in such a blinding storm, and go to the spot where my father came upon you—beside the remains of the murdered man?"

Morris Norton was pale, but he was cool.

"Neither can I answer that—to you," he said. "Like the other questions, though, I can make it clear and satisfactory to judge and jury."

"Yes, no doubt you can. If you could not it would be dangerous to press the charge of murder against my father. They are serious questions."

"I know they are, but I can answer them. Do not think, though, that I am going to lay bare my hand before you. Perhaps I have more proofs against your father than he is aware of."

"Well, be that as it may—you want my final answer, of course."

"Yes, I do. And have a care that you do not refuse."

"Then listen, for my answer to my father will be my answer to you," and turning to Abel, she went on:

"Father, did I think you guilty of this crime—did I believe you a murderer—I would end my life this very hour. But I do not believe you are guilty. You are innocent."

"Thank heaven you can believe me so. I am innocent! as innocent as you."

"I know you are. But, being innocent, and afraid to trust to God to prove you so; being innocent, yet forcing me to a life of misery to shield yourself; being innocent, and allowing such a man as Morris Norton to hold power over you, you are—A COWARD!"

With an almost scream, Abel Winton sprung to his feet.

"Yes," Ettie went on, "you are a coward. You took a cowardly step at first, and you have followed the path of cowardice since."

"My father, I believe you innocent, and if you have lost all faith in God, I have not. He will protect you. And now, for the last time, I answer you that I will never marry Morris Norton."

A queen of the tragedy stage could not have spoken with more grandeur and force.

Morris Norton was upon his feet in an instant, his face as pale as death.

"By heavens, girl!" he hissed, "you shall marry me!"

"No!" thundered Abel Winton, in tones no longer guarded, "she shall not. By the God in whom she puts such faith, I swear it. A coward I have been, Morris Norton, but I am so no longer. My eyes are open. Go on and do your worst. Lay your proof before the detectives, and let them make out of it what they can, for, unless you do so, I shall go to them myself."

"Ettie, my child, God bless you. You may go—free."

Throwing herself into her father's arms, Ettie burst into a flood of tears.

Norton stood by with a scowl upon his face. He had yet one more trump in hand.

After a few moments, and after whispering words of encouragement to her father, Ettie kissed him and left the room. And not only did she leave the room, but she hastened out of the house as well.

Going at once to the neighbor's where she knew Jane Winton to be, she entered and said:

"Mother, I am going at once to spend the night with Kate Nelson. Do not feel anxious about me."

"Is Kate worse?" inquired the neighbor, noticing Ettie's tear-stained face and excited manner.

"Y—yes," Ettie faltered, and the next moment she was gone.

Hastening down the street to the old road, she turned into that, and, without a thought of fear, hastened away up the hill.

"No, no," she muttered, "I cannot spend this night at home. I will spend it with Kate, and then when Walter comes there to-morrow, I will be prepared to tell him that I cannot marry him. He will demand the reason, but I cannot give it. It will pain him, I know; and, ah! it will break my heart! But, it must be so. It would be a crime for me to marry him now, knowing that in a few hours my father may be arrested for murder."

"Arrested for murder! Oh! my heavenly Father, have mercy upon him—and me."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NORTON WINS.

AFTER Ettie Winton had gone from the room, Abel Winton and Morris Norton glared at each other for fully a minute without either of them speaking.

Norton was the first to break the silence.

"Well, Abel," he said, "a fine mess you have made of it, I must say!"

"Morris," Abel returned, "I want you to leave my house, and never put foot upon my premises again. I am in your power no longer. To-morrow morning I shall go to a justice and make a full statement of all I know concerning the murder of Amos Norman. I will be arrested and tried. I may be found guilty, and perhaps be hanged; but force my daughter to marry you to save me from danger—never!"

Norton coolly sat down.

"Leave my house, I say!" Abel cried.

"Don't be in such an infernal big hurry," said Norton. "I have more to say to you on this subject."

"Not another word! Go—leave my house at once!"

"Sit down, I tell you, and hear what I have got to say."

"By heavens!" Abel cried, white with rage, "am I not master of my own house? Again I bid you go, you human devil! or I will not be responsible for my act."

As he spoke, Abel again drew his knife.

Norton's only reply was, to bring his revolver from his pocket and raise its hammer.

"You defy me!" Abel exclaimed.

"Yes, I defy you. Sit down, now, or by heavens I'll make you. This is no boys' play, Abel Winton. I have entered upon this thing to win, and I do not mean to give it up."

Abel sat down.

"Well," he said, "since you have me foul, say what you will. When you get tired of talking, then go."

"Yes, I will do so. And now listen: You have made a fool of yourself. Is life of no value to you, that you would throw it away so recklessly?"

"Life is as sweet to me as it is to any man."

"It is strange, then, that you do not make an effort to save it."

"I intend to. I shall employ able lawyers, and I believe I shall win."

"Abel, you can't win. Once I tell what I know, nothing can save you. Who, think you, will believe such a story as you will tell? Certainly twelve men sworn to go strictly in accordance with the evidence of the case will not be able to do otherwise than return a verdict of guilty."

To this, Abel made no reply. His thoughts flew over the facts of the case, and again his position rose up before him in all its horror. He realized that what Norton said was only too true.

"When you tell your story in open court," Norton went on, "you will be laughed at. You, an innocent man, to do as you did—bah! there will be no question of your guilt."

Still Abel Winton was silent. Was he wavering from his purpose? or, was he guilty?

"As for your daughter," Norton continued, "she is a fine actress. She is playing a nice game at your expense. Little cares she, it seems, whether you are hanged or not."

"What do you mean now?" Abel demanded.

"I mean just what I say. She is only mocking you. She thinks more of herself, by far."

"Explain yourself."

"Well, to-morrow when you are giving yourself up to the law, to be hanged for a murder you say you are not guilty of, and doing it to spare your daughter from marrying me, she, the dutiful child, will be marrying another man."

"What in the infernal are you getting at?" Abel demanded, fiercely.

"Oh! you are interested, are you?"

"Speak, I tell you! Explain what you mean!"

"Well, with all her sentiment so grandly expressed, with all her loving caresses; with all her acting; Ettie was only seeking to get release from marrying me in order to marry Walter Prince, the artist, to-morrow. Little she cares what becomes of you, so long as she is suited."

"Is this true?"

"It is nothing else."

"But, what proof have you of it?"

"I have ample proof, I can assure you."

"That my daughter intends to marry that young artist to-morrow!"

"Exactly."

"Heavens! it cannot be."

"It not only can be, Abel Winton, but it will be, unless you appear in time to stop the ceremony."

"My God! can she be as false as this? I cannot believe it!"

"Still it is true."

"How came you to learn of it?"

"I will tell you: This morning as I was going up the hill toward the cross-road, I heard voices. I listened, and found they came from the place just aside from the road where the hill-side spring is. Curious to know who was there, for the voices were a man's and a woman's, I made my way silently in and hid behind one of the big trees. Who should the persons prove to be but your daughter and her—her lover."

"Walter Prince?"

"Exactly. Well, of course I listened, and I heard an interesting conversation, I can assure you."

"What was it?"

"Oh! they were talking love, in the main, but there was business in it, too. The young artist was begging your daughter to marry him. They both confessed their love for each other, but she was afraid to give him an answer because, as she told him, you had said that she should marry me. She knew that I had some hold upon you, but she thought it was something concerning money matters."

"And she told him that?"

"Yes."

"Well, what then?"

"Well, then he expressed his opinion that you were a little more than cruel to sell your daughter to save yourself, and finally turned Ettie against you so that she promised to marry him."

"Thunder and guns! can she be playing such a game?"

"Yes, she can, and is. Leaving you to your fate, not caring whether you die by your own hand or go to the gallows, when she might save you if she would, she has gone to keep her appointment with her lover. Oh! a dutiful child is she, Abel."

"It shall not be!" Abel cried. "I will call her down this instant and demand an explanation!" and he started to carry out his intention.

"Oh! she is not up-stairs," said Norton; "she went out. Ten to one she is on her way over to Farmer Nelson's at this very minute."

Just then Jane Winton and the girls returned, and entered the room.

"I thought you were to stay out until I sent for you," said Abel, sternly.

"Why, Abel," Jane answered, "I supposed your business was done. Ettie just came over, and—"

"Where is Ettie now?"

"She has started to—to—"

"Where has she started to?"

"To go to Farmer Nelson's. She said Kato is worse, and she was going to spend the night with her."

Not knowing what to say, Jane had followed the explanation Ettie had given herself.

Morris Norton gave Abel a glance that was full of meaning.

"Come!" Abel cried, snatching up his hat, "we will finish our conversation out of doors." And out he went.

Morris Norton bade good-night to Mrs. Winton, and followed.

Walking down through the garden until they came to the fence at the end of it, the two men stopped there.

"Well, what did I tell you?" Norton remarked.

"By heavens!" Abel cried, in hot anger, "but that girl shall pay for her falseness to me!"

"I thought I would bring you back to your senses."

"Yes, and I'm glad you have. To think of the sacrifice I was about to make for her, when she, on her part, cared not whether I lived or died. Calling me a coward, too, to drive me on to defy you. Oh! it is too much. I would not have believed it of her."

"No, nor I, if I had not seen and heard. Now, what is to be done?"

"What is to be done! Why, she shall marry you, Morris, if it costs her life. My heart has been full of pity for her all along, and to-night she roused my sympathy to the crowning point; but now I am determined. Who could imagine, to look into her eyes, that she was playing me false? She has the face of an angel!"

"You are right there."

"Tell me though, why has she gone over to Nelson's?"

"Oh! that was another part of her scheme. She said she went to spend the night with Kate, because she is worse. Have you heard that Kate is any worse?"

"No."

"Nor I. That was all a falsehood. She has gone over to Nelson's because there, at ten o'clock to-morrow morning, she is to be married."

Abel Winton could hardly believe that he heard aright. Could it be possible? Could it be that Ettie, so like her mother in face, form and disposition, could be so unlike her in heart?

Abel Winton's first wife had been the very personification of truth, purity and goodness, and as his thoughts turned in memory to her, a tear appeared upon his cheek.

Well he remembered when she, the daughter of a wealthy planter, had left her home, friends and fortune to marry him; and as these thoughts came upon him, he felt less severe toward Ettie.

But at his elbow stood the tempter in the person of Morris Norton.

"Do you understand, Abel?" he asked. "At ten o'clock to-morrow she is to be married."

"Yes, I understand."

"Well, what are you going to do about it? Remember, your life is at stake. There is no sense in risking the hangman's noose when it can be so easily avoided."

"No, you are right. Still, I am tempted to take my life and end it all."

"Fool! why will you talk such nonsense? Would you kill yourself, and leave that girl to triumph over her victory? Remember, too, you have no right to take your life. You have a family dependent upon you. Nor should you bring disgrace upon them by getting into this trouble when you can so easily avoid it."

"Say, and for the last time I demand it; do you intend to carry out your part of our compact, or do you not?"

"Yes, I do. Your last argument has decided me fully and finally. Ettie Winton shall marry you. Now, have you any plans?"

"Yes, I have."

"What are they?"

"Well, the present arrangement is this: Your daughter is to meet Walter Prince at the house of Farmer Nelson at ten o'clock to-morrow morning. Old Dominie Green is to be engaged to be there at that hour to marry them. That is their plan."

"You come up to my place early in the morning, and we will set out from there in time to reach Nelson's just about ten o'clock. There we will find the dominie, and there and then your daughter can be made my wife."

"And, Abel, once she is my wife, then your danger is past. I will return your claim, and never mention what I know. I promise to prove a good husband to your girl, and, despite all she says now, I am sure she will in time learn to love me as well as she fancies she loves Walter Prince now. Do you agree?"

"Yes, I do. I will follow your plan. But, suppose we get there too late? Suppose we find her already the wife of another?"

"Oh! no fear of that, Abel," and the villain smiled as he thought of his plan to dispose of the young artist; "no fear of that, I guess. I shall plan to detain Prince in some way or other."

"You don't mean—"

"What?"

"You don't mean to put him out of the way, I hope?"

"Kill him? Oh, no!"

"Well, I agree to your plan, for I see more than ever, now, that I must keep my secret. I might escape death, but my family would suffer disgrace, and my name would ever bear a stain upon it. That must not be."

"You will come to my place early to-morrow, then."

"Yes, I will be there."

With this understanding they parted.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DEATH-TRAP.

BLUE-GRASS BURT was seated in the bar-room of the Open Door Hotel, about half an hour after Morris Norton and Abel Winton parted company, enjoying a cigar and resting after his day's work.

Colonel Emmery Cass was there, in the best of spirits, and was telling of the "bonanza" he had struck.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "I'm th' happiest man alive! I don't care a tinker's tink whether th' school keeps or not! If Priscilla don't want ter relent, b'gol, she needn't! I'm independent!"

"Say, Tom," to the proprietor, "be ye sure I haven't any credit here? I don't think ye've kept careful 'count o' my bankin's, have ye? Ain't there nary a single dime to my account?"

"No, colonel," the landlord replied, "there ain't a dime nor a cent. You've swallowed everything."

"You're sure?"

"Of course I am. I have always kept fair an' square 'count, colonel."

"Well, we'll take yer word fer it, Tom. If you say I'm broke, broke I am; and hence I weep."

"Heavens! I only wish th' mail arrived every hour!"

"You seem to have struck oil," some one remarked.

"Struck oil! wal, I should say so. It ain't oil, though, it's whisky; th' genuine pure and straight article."

"And all for carryin' that young doctor's letters, eh?"

"Exactly."

"Not very hard work, is it?"

"Oh, no; it's light work and big pay. Bless yer soul, though, I'd carry his mail if it weighed a ton. I'd carry anything. I'd carry th' Government debt, if they'd keep me supplied with whisky."

"Oh! whisky, whisky! I love thee, I love thee."

"I love it, I love it, and who shall dare—"

To chide me for loving old whisky so rare."

So the colonel sung, to the tune of the "Old Arm Chair."

"There!" he cried, "if that ain't worth a drink, Tom, I'd like to know it."

"Well, colonel," the landlord said, taking down a bottle, and pouring a little into a glass, "it is worth a taste, anyhow; and here you are."

"Thank'e, Tom, thank'e," the colonel exclaimed, as he took the glass. "I see your heart is beating as of yore. Just put it down."

"No," said the landlord. "I'll give it to ye."

"Oh, well, much 'bliged then. Here's your health." And up went the glass and down went the liquor.

"Ah! ye gods! ye gods!" the colonel then exclaimed, patting his vest in front. "My life, my soul, my hope hereafter! Blessed spring of ambrosial nectar! Bread and meat for kings and queens! Fount of every blessing, and tide of perennial youth!"

"Oh! I love it, I love it, and who shall dare—"

To chide me for loving old whisky so rare."

At that moment a boy entered, glanced around with a half-frightened air, and then advanced to the bar and handed a letter to the landlord.

The landlord took it, and the boy turned and hastened away at once.

Holding the letter up to the light, the landlord read its superscription, and then turning toward Blue-Grass Burt, said:

"Mr. Prince, this heur letter is for you, I reckon. It's got your name to it."

"A letter for me?" Burt queried, as he got up and approached the bar; "let me see."

Taking the letter from the landlord's hand, he read the address:

"WALTER PRINCE. Artist,

"Open Door Hotel."

"Personal."

"Yes," he said, "it is for me. Where is that boy? He was in a hurry to get away, it seems to me."

"Yes, he's gone, sure enough."

"Well, no matter. This is some petty bill I owe somewhere in town, I suppose."

Returning to his seat, Burt opened the letter, and read:

"MR. PRINCE:—"

"If you would learn of something greatly to your interest and advantage, you will meet me at ten o'clock to-night in the middle of the bridge which

crosses the river about a mile above this town. You are about to take an important step, and there are certain secrets which you should know, as your whole future happiness or misery depends upon it. Should you decline to meet me, I shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing that I have warned you. This is from one who knows your secret."

There was no signature.

Folding this mysterious missive with as much apparent unconcern as though it were really nothing more important than some "petty bill," as he had remarked to the landlord upon receiving it, the detective put it into his pocket and consulted his watch.

It was half-past nine. He would have ample time to reach the bridge at the appointed hour. Should he go?

For some moments he sat silent, looking at the case from all sides.

Whom could this note be from? That he could not answer. The writing was strange to him. He had never seen the hand before. Why did the writer name such an unusual place for the meeting? Either treachery was intended, or else the person—he took it to be a man—was afraid of being seen. In the next place, what secret of his was hinted at? It was positively certain that no one knew he was a detective, at least no one save his own men. What, then, could it be? It must be the secret of his intention to marry Ettie Winton on the morrow. Some one must have overheard his conversation with her that forenoon. If this suspicion was correct, what was the secret he should know? Was there some obstacle in the way of his marrying that girl?

Not knowing what to think about it, Burt resolved to keep the appointment. There might be danger ahead, he well knew, but he was prepared for it. He was not afraid to face any man, even in such a lonely spot as he knew the bridge to be at ten o'clock at night; and if there were more than one—well, he was armed.

Still, he reasoned, it would be wise to have help at hand, in case of need.

The five Government officers were in the bar-room at the time; in fact, they were not often anywhere else; and Burt made one of a certain set of signals that had been agreed upon.

His signal was this:

"Two follow me carefully, in disguise and at a distance. Do not approach me unless called."

The signal was understood, and in a moment two of the officers got up and went out by the rear door.

The moment they were outside they hastened to a spot where they would be unseen, and quickly turned their coats and hats inside out.

The change was wonderful. Hardly any one would have recognized him, meeting them at night.

As soon as the change was made, they passed around the hotel and took up their position on the opposite side of the street, and there waited for Blue-Grass Burt to appear.

These men were the chief of five and one of the other.

Giving them plenty of time, Burt presently went out and started up the turnpike toward the bridge.

The two men followed him at a distance.

Burt set resolutely out toward his destination. The night was dark and the road a lonely one, for the limits of the town were soon passed and the houses became fewer and far between; but at last the foot of the bridge was reached.

There the detective paused and coughed, a signal for his men to advance no further unless called, and then he started on.

Up to this time Burt had given but little thought to the strange case in hand. He had run over it in his mind at the hotel, taking a glance at it from different points of view, and, having resolved to obey the mysterious message, had thought but little more about it.

Now, however, as he looked out upon the dismal bridge, something akin to a presentiment of danger took possession of him.

Why had his mysterious correspondent chosen such a lonely place for the interview? It was a place where they were not likely to be interrupted, but if harm was intended, then a better place for the purpose could not have been selected.

Here a murder might be committed, the body thrown into the water, and no human eye, perhaps, would bear witness to the deed.

So it might have been, had the intended victim been a man of only ordinary caution; but the Gold Star Detective was one who was seldom caught off his guard.

After stepping upon the bridge, Burt proceeded more slowly. He did not know how soon he might come face to face with the unknown person who had summoned him.

His two men, having responded to his signal, advanced cautiously to the foot of the bridge, and there in the deep shadows they stopped to await further orders.

There was barely light enough to enable the detective to see from one side of the bridge to the other, and of course he could see no further than the width of the bridge ahead.

When he thought he must be near the middle he suddenly caught sight of a figure leaning against the railing on the same side he was on.

Burt stopped at once, and the figure started toward him.

The detective's quick eye took in all there was to learn as the man—for a man it was—drew near. He was a tall man, muffled in a dark cloak, and over his face he wore a black mask.

"Are you Walter Prince, the artist who is stopping at the Open Door Hotel in yonder town?" the man asked, as he came up, speaking in a voice that was hoarse and unnatural in its tone.

"Yes," Burt answered, "I am he. Are you the person who sent me a note requesting me to come here at ten o'clock?"

"I am."

"Well, what is your business with me?"

"You are in danger."

"Am I?"

"Yes."

"Well, what is my danger?"

"And not only are you in danger, but I have important things to tell you, which even the night winds must not hear."

"Well, what is the danger? and what are the secrets you have to disclose? Please come to the point at once."

"I will do so. I have urgent and important things to tell you, Walter Prince," and the man approached still closer to where the artist stood; "I have summoned you here—" and he leaned over as though about to speak in a whisper, when, with a quick movement, he drew a long, glittering knife from under his cloak, lifted his arm, and hissed—"to die!"

Almost instantly the knife descended, aimed straight at the detective's heart.

CHAPTER XXX.

AN IMPORTANT FIND.

"Halt! you villain!" Blue-Grass Burt cried, "this is your game, is it! Lucky for me I was on my guard." And ere the words were spoken he had caught the wrist of the descending arm in his right hand, and with his left tore away the mask from the man's face.

The would-be murderer was Morris Norton.

With a cry of baffled rage the rascal tried to change the knife to his left hand, but the detective was too quick for him.

Burt's grip was like a grip of steel, and with a sudden thrust he caused Norton's hand to relax its hold, and the knife was sent flying over the rail.

"So, this is your game, eh?" Burt repeated.

"Yes," cried Norton, making a desperate effort and breaking away, "this is my game. And now it is your life or mine. One of us shall never leave this bridge alive."

"Well," said Burt, coolly, "I can assure you that I have no intention of giving up the ghost here, if you have. And now let me ask why you have lured me here to attempt my life? What have I done to you?"

"You are in my way!" Norton hissed, fiercely.

"In your way! How can that be?"

"You stand between me and my future happiness."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"I do not understand you."

"You mean you do not want to understand me."

"It may be so. Still, explain what you mean."

"I will do so. You love Ettie Winton, and so do I. But one of us can have her. And that one—shall not be you!"

"How do you know that I love the lady you name?"

"Because I heard your conversation with her this morning."

"My conversation with Ettie Winton?"

"Yes. You need not try to deny it; you were up there on the hill by the spring, and I stood behind one of the trees. I heard it all."

"Oh! I do not mean to deny it. It is true enough. I only wanted to see how much you know."

"Well, are you satisfied?"

"I am."

"Well, then, come to business. You have got to fight me, here and now, and to the death!"

"Do you mean it?"

"By heavens, yes!"

Burt had not been idle, so far as keeping an eye open to danger was concerned. He had moved around so as to get his back to the rail, in order to prevent an attack from behind, in case Norton had an accomplice near at hand.

"And you're willing to take the risk of my killing you instead of you killing me, are you?"

"Yes, I am."

"Then, Morris Norton," and Burt spoke loud enough for his men at the end of the bridge to hear his words, "I will fight you."

"Hist! you fool!" Norton cried in guarded tones; "do you want to inform the people in town of what is going on here?"

"It makes no difference to me who hears," Burt rejoined; "I am fighting on the defensive."

"Well, we have had enough talk, so look out for yourself. It is your life or mine!" and as he uttered the words Norton sprung upon the de-

tective with all the force and fury he could command.

The detective met him, and then ensued a fearful struggle. Both were strong men, and the detective fully realized that his life was at stake. And Norton, he believed it was a duel to the death either way. He certainly intended to kill his adversary if he won; and if he lost, then he certainly expected to be killed. Both seemed to be proficient in wrestling, and they swayed to and fro with rapid movements, the bridge resounding with the strokes of their feet.

For some time it was doubtful which would win.

Meanwhile, when the detective's loud-spoken words reached the ears of the two revenue officers, the chief exclaimed in a whisper:

"By heavens! Burt has met Morris Norton, and they are going to fight. Did you catch his words?"

"Yes," the other answered. "I heard what he said."

"He spoke aloud on purpose for us to hear," the chief added. "Come, we may be wanted. Let us cross to the other side and skulk along down to where they are. We will be all the nearer if he signals us to come."

Swiftly but silently the two men crossed the bridge, and made their way along the other side till they came where they could witness the struggle.

The desperate fight lasted for three or four minutes, perhaps, and then of a sudden the detective won the mastery. By a clever movement he brought his antagonist backward against the rail of the bridge, and there held him so that he could not move.

"Are you satisfied?" he demanded.

"N-no!" Norton gasped. "Kill me, or I will kill you; it is your life or mine!"

"You're mistaken," said Burt. "I do not intend to kill you, nor do I intend to let you kill me."

"Let me up, and I'll show you! We will fight it out!"

"Oh, no! We have done that already, and I have won. Say, can you swim?"

"Let me up, I say! I—"

"Can you swim?" Burt again demanded.

"Yes, I can."

"Then swim for your life!" and as he spoke, the detective lifted him up bodily and hurled him over the rail. A loud splash followed, and then all was still.

"There," said Burt, as he turned away; "a bath may serve to cool you off a little. Your next stroke no doubt will be a stroke in the dark."

He was turning away from the rail as he spoke, and he stepped upon something that seemed to twist under his foot.

Stooping down, he picked the object up.

It was a broken watch-chain—the very one Morris Norton had found, and which belonged to Abel Winton.

"Heavens!" Burt cried. "What is this, I wonder?"

Holding it up so that he could see it as clearly as the dim light would admit of, he made the discovery that it was the very chain he had been looking for for weeks—the very one to which belonged the charm he had found.

"Ah, ha!" he muttered, "found at last! Thank you, Morris Norton—thank you for bringing me here. All along I have suspected you of being the murderer of poor Amos Norman, and now I know it."

Little did Blue-Grass Burt imagine to whom that chain belonged.

Picking up his hat, the detective started back the way he had come, when the two officers made known their presence and crossed over and joined him.

"Well, what does all this mean, anyhow?" the chief inquired.

"It means," Burt answered in guarded tones, as the three walked on in company, "that I have found the murderer of Amos Norman."

"You have?"

"Yes."

"And who is it?"

"It is Morris Norton."

"Just what we have suspected all along. How came you to pin it down on him?"

"I will tell you. On the ground where poor Norman's body was found I found this watch-chain, with two links and a broken one attached, just as you see it now," and he showed the object in question. "Since then," he continued, "I have been constantly watching for the chain to which it belongs, and this night I have found it. During the struggle it has fallen out of Morris Norton's pocket."

"Then you have the deadwood on him at last?"

"Yes."

"How came he to call you here? That note was from him, I suppose?"

"Yes, it was from him. He wanted to get me here to murder me. And he came mighty near doing it, too. If I hadn't been on my guard, he would have cut my heart in twain."

"The villain!"

"Not only a villain is he, but a murderer. His watch-chain proves it."

"Yes, you're right. What did he want you out of the way for? Has he found out who you are?"

"No, it is that other affair. I am in his path, you see."

"Oh! I understand. 'Well, what are you going to do now?'"

"I will tell you. I am not ready to make myself known yet, but I want you to arrest Norton to-morrow and lodge him in jail, charged with the murder. Get your warrant as early as you can, and then go for him."

"Suppose, though, he is dead? He may have drowned."

"There is little fear of that. The Evil One watches over his own to the last moment."

"And what about proof when I arrest him?"

"Well, I will have to make myself known. Still, perhaps we can crowd his hearing off for a day or two, until we attend to that other matter."

"Would it not be well to let the rascal go for a day or two longer, before arresting him?"

"Yes, it would. But he is a desperate character, and there is no knowing what he might do. I do not want to expose that girl to any danger, you know, and he might take it into his head to kill her. By the way, I intend to marry her to-morrow."

"You do?"

"Yes, I do."

"Where?"

"At the house of Farmer Nelson, over the hill."

"Well, this is news! And you are right in arresting Norton at once. He has shown to-night how desperate he is, and, as you say, there is no telling what he might do. Yes, I will arrest him to-morrow. I will take care that he does not mar your pleasure."

"You see," added Burt, "he knows that I am to marry Ettie Winton, and he knows that the wedding is to take place at ten o'clock to-morrow at Farmer Nelson's; and there would be danger in leaving him at large. Yes, he must be arrested, and I shall have to crowd my plans forward accordingly."

"Under the circumstances, that is the safest course. I'll attend to it. I'll get the warrant as early as I can, and then I'll spring the surprise on him. By the way, you haven't invited me to your wedding, though."

Burt laughed.

"No," he said, "and what is more, I can't. We are strangers, you know. I am an artist, a humble devil who tramps around through the woods taking sketches of scenery; you are a United States officer, a great fellow who 'draws a fat salary and idles away his time in the bar-room,' to quote from the paper that went for you so strong. We have nothing in common."

"Yes," the officer snapped, "and that editor has got to take back every word of it before we leave this town, too."

"That is right."

And again Burt laughed.

The "Weekly News" had hit the revenue officers in a tender place, and although they had set themselves right in the eyes of the editor personally, the offending article could not be retracted until the arrests were made; and in the eyes of the public the officers were greatly demeaned. Hence they longed for the time for action to come.

"Besides," Burt went on, "the marriage is to be clandestine, so please let out no hint that you know anything about it."

"Certainly not," the chief replied, and he cautioned his man to bear it in mind. "But," he inquired, "why is it clandestine?"

Burt told the story, then, in full.

"You are right," the old officer said, approvingly. "You might look the whole world over, and you would not find a more promising girl. And certain it is that you would not find a more charming one. Yes, you are right, so go ahead; and I will take care that your rival does not trouble you."

Thus they talked until they neared the town, when they separated.

A short time later the young artist returned to the Open Door Hotel, showing no signs of his recent struggle, and soon after, the two officers entered the bar-room, by the same door they had gone out, again wearing their uniforms of blue.

About that same hour Morris Norton was making his way home, as wet as a drowned rat.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AT THE APPOINTED HOUR.

In the mean time Ettie Winton had pressed bravely onward, and reached Farmer Nelson's place about ten o'clock without accident or mishap.

Ettie was a brave girl. Brave as she was, though, a feeling of fear had seized her as she passed the spot where she had been stopped by the tramp on the evening when Walter Prince had come to her rescue.

What if a tramp should stop her now?

Hurrying swiftly onward, though, she was presently out of the woods, and in due time reached her destination.

The Nelsons were not a little surprised to see her, but when she told her story—omitting, of

course, her father's dread secret—she was welcomed heartily.

Early in the morning she paid a visit to Kate Nelson's room, found her feeling decidedly better, and the two girls spent a very pleasant hour together.

As the morning advanced, though, Ettie became excessively nervous, and tears frequently came into her eyes.

Seeing this, Mrs. Nelson finally inquired the cause.

Then Ettie told more than she had told on the previous night—that it was impossible for her to keep her promise to her lover; that she could not marry him.

To all questions she had but the one reply—that it was impossible; but the reason she could not tell. She was duty-bound to keep a dreadful secret, and duty-bound none the less to refuse to become her lover's wife, as she had promised.

The artist-detective was the first to arrive, coming earlier than the appointed hour, and he was surprised and pained to find Ettie in tears. What could it mean?

"Ettie, my darling, my promised wife," he said, "why do I find you weeping?"

"Because my heart is breaking," she sobbed.

"Oh, Walter, I cannot—cannot marry you as I have promised!"

"Not marry me!"

"No, it is now impossible."

"It is now impossible! Oh, Ettie, how can you say that? I cannot—will not believe it! Why is it impossible? What has happened?"

"I cannot tell you, oh! I cannot tell you; and yet it is true. It is now impossible for me to become your wife."

"You have not decided to obey your father after all, and wed?"

"Morris Norton? Never!"

"And you still love me!"

"Yes—yes. I love you so much that my very life is yours. I love you so much that I am duty-bound to refuse to marry you."

"Oh, Ettie, you must, you shall tell me what has happened to change you so in so short a time. There is a secret—"

"Yes, there is a secret, Walter; a secret which I cannot confide even to you. Leave me, oh! leave me, if you love me, and forget that we ever met."

"Never! Do you imagine that I can give you up—that I will give you up? I will know what this secret is if it takes a lifetime to find it out."

"Oh, do not attempt it, I beg of you. You will only despise me when you learn it. Oh! leave me, go away from here if you love me, and forget that you ever saw me."

Hard-headed, far-sighted, and clear-thinking as Blue-Grass Burt was, he knew not what to make of this. Whatever Ettie's secret was, it was something she had learned since their meeting of yesterday. What could it be? For a long time he questioned, coaxed, and pleaded, but it was all in vain. Ettie's answer was always the same. It was plain to be seen that she suffered, that it tore her heart to take back the promise she had given, but she was bound, doubly bound to the course she was taking.

While the lovers were alone together in the little parlor, Alphonso St. Eric arrived to see his patient, and finding her so much improved, he was much elated.

"I—aw—I thought I was not much mistaken," he said. "In a few weeks I shall have you out of bed, Miss Nelson, and in a few months you—aw—you will be as well as ever."

These encouraging words caused the young lady's eyes to fill with tears of joy, and grasping the doctor's hands between her own so white and feeble, she thanked him again and again.

Alphonso sat and conversed with her for some time, and during their conversation Kate mentioned the coming wedding.

She was not aware that Ettie Winton had broken her word with her lover.

"A wedding here!" Alphonso cried, "indeed!"

"Yes," Kate assured, "at ten o'clock."

"Why, it is almost that hour now!" as he consulted his watch. "Why, I shall certainly remain and witness it, even though I—aw—am not invited. Mr. Prince and I are the very best of friends, I assure you."

Alphonso prepared some new medicines to last until his next call, gave directions for their use, and then Mrs. Nelson conducted him to the parlor, she having come in just as he was about leaving the room.

"You are—aw—to have quite an event here this morning, I am told," he remarked, as they descended the stairs.

"Alas! I fear not," Mrs. Nelson responded. "For some mysterious reason, sir, Miss Winton declines to keep her promise."

"Can it be?"

"Yes. I am sure I do not know what has happened, but the poor girl is almost in despair."

"Oh! this is too bad, weally. I had better not venture to intrude, then."

At that moment Blue-Grass Burt stepped out into the hall.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "here you are, doctor. I was about to call you. Please step in here. Miss Winton has fainted."

This was true. The excitement and pain at heart had proved more than she could bear.

The young doctor stepped into the room at once, and kneeling down beside the poor girl, applied a vial of smelling-salts to her delicate nostrils.

In a few moments she opened her eyes.

Calling upon the others then to bathe her face and chafe her hands, the doctor prepared a little medicine in some water, which was given to her as soon as she could sit up.

Kneeling before her, still caressing her hand, the artist-detective could not hold back the tears that came into his eyes.

"My God, Ettie," he gasped, "why will you torture yourself and me in this cruel way? Tell me your secret, I beg of you."

"Oh! I cannot, I cannot!" Ettie moaned.

"Leave me, oh! leave me if you love me, Walter. My God! if I could only die!"

Burt was in despair.

"You must not excite the lady any more, my dear Mr. Prince," said Alphonso, decidedly.

"She cannot stand it."

"No, no, I cannot stand it," Ettie cried.

"Leave me, oh! please leave me."

Just then came a knock at the door. It proved to be the minister whom Burt had engaged to perform the ceremony.

He was shown into the parlor, where he was greatly surprised to find every face wearing so serious an expression.

His first thought was for Kate Nelson, that she had been called away, and he, too, grew serious in an instant.

"Mrs. Nelson," he said, "I fear there is sadness here. I hope your dear daughter—"

"Oh! no," the woman hastened to assure, "it is not that, thank God it is not that! Indeed, Kate is a great deal better."

"No," added Burt, stepping forward, "it is not that."

"Then may I inquire—"

"Certainly, for the matter must be explained to you. Miss Winton has, I am sorry to say, suddenly declined to marry me. Nor will she give her reason. There is some sad mystery back of it all, and what it is she cannot be induced to tell. I fear, sir, that your services will not be required."

"I am sorry for this," the minister returned, "and I am sorry for you, sir. From what you told me yesterday, I looked forward to this moment with pleasure. You assured me that you loved each other devotedly, and—"

"And so we do still," Ettie suddenly interrupted. "Since yesterday, though, I have learned a secret which makes it impossible for me to marry. At least, it is impossible at present. It would be a sacrilege, almost, for me to do so."

"Then," cried Burt, "there is hope for me still; hope that you may yet become mine! Oh! Ettie, tell me that I may hope."

"Yes," she answered, in a low voice, "there is hope, thank heaven! there is hope. This cloud may soon pass, and then all will be well. If it does not pass, if it settles its shadow over my life forever, then you will know why I refuse to marry you now. It is for your sake, Walter, that I do refuse."

"Thank you for your words, Ettie, my love, and may heaven bless you. I will not press you further to tell me what your secret is now."

"It would be useless to do so."

"I shall learn what it is, though," Burt added, "and if the shadow you speak of is to be moved by human power, I will banish it forever."

Ettie uttered no further protest, but sat weeping silently.

"And may heaven bless you both," said the minister, reverently. "Miss Winton must have good reason for the course she is taking, but I trust and hope that whatever the barrier is, it may soon be removed. Put your trust in Him who rules all things, my children, and all in good time He will brush the clouds away."

"Thank you for your words, reverend sir," said Burt. "You renew my hopes."

At that instant a team of horses was heard approaching at a terrific gait. A moment later a wagon stopped before the house, and then, without waiting to be admitted, Abel Winton and Morris Norton burst into the room.

No one present was more surprised than Blue-Grass Burt. What could his men be doing, that they had not carried out his instructions?

Abel Winton, white with passion and excitement, glared around the room for an instant, and then demanded:

"Has this marriage taken place?"

"No, sir," answered Burt, promptly, "it has not!"

"Then I forbid it!" Abel cried. "Do you understand, sir?" turning to the minister; "I forbid this marriage."

"You need have no uneasiness, sir," the minister answered; "no marriage is intended."

"Not intended! what do you mean?"

"I mean, sir, that your daughter refuses to have the ceremony go on."

Abel looked at Morris Norton. Could all be true of Ettie that had been said?

Norton returned the look with one full of meaning, and turning to his daughter Abel said:

"Ettie, come here."

With trembling limbs and faltering steps Ettie obeyed.

"Take hold of this man's hand," Abel ordered, indicating Norton.

Ettie drew back with a visible shudder.

"I cannot, oh! I cannot!" she cried.

"Do as I bid you!" Abel thundered.

"Father, I will not." And the poor girl sunk down upon a chair.

"Zounds!" Abel cried, "do you refuse to obey me? Morris, you take hold of her hand, then. And you," turning upon the minister, "you will marry my daughter to this man. It is my will."

Morris Norton stepped forward toward Ettie, when suddenly the iron hand of Blue-Grass Burt fell upon his shoulder and hurled him back.

"Touch that lady at your peril!" the detective warned.

"And I," declared the minister, "certainly refuse my services."

At that instant into the room rushed the five revenue officers, their badges displayed.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE ARREST.

THE chief revenue officer had had more than a little trouble in getting a warrant for Morris Norton, owing to his having to ride all around to find the justice, who was not in his office when he called there.

He found him at last, but by the time he got the warrant it was after nine o'clock.

Then he and his men set out for Norton's place and as they approached they saw a team and wagon, with two men, leave the place and dash away down the turnpike.

They guessed at once, and correctly, that these men were Morris Norton and Abel Winton.

The officers were approaching across country from the place where they had found the justice, and as it was impossible for them to head their man off, they could only give chase.

Stopping at Norton's place to make sure it was Norton they had seen, they turned out upon the highway road and started in pursuit.

They had no difficulty in following the wagon, but they found it impossible to overtake it.

Straight to town did Norton lead the way, then turned into the old road leading up the hill, and then straight on to Farmer Nelson's.

Thus they arrived there in the order given.

When the officers entered the room, the tableau was made complete. Morris Norton stood where the Gold Star Detective had hurled him, glaring fiercely at his rival, who stood ready to attack him again if he attempted to advance. The old dominie stood before Abel Winton, his face calm but stern, while Abel's was white with rage. Ettie reclined on the chair onto which she had dropped, behind her lover and the minister. Apart from these stood Mrs. Nelson and the young doctor.

Such was the scene when the officers entered, and it remained the same, except that all eyes were instantly turned upon them.

For a moment no one moved or spoke, and then the chief of the five officers stepped over to Morris Norton, laid his hand heavily upon his arm, and said:

"Morris Norton, you are my prisoner. I arrest you for the murder of Amos Norman."

Had a cannon-ball suddenly burst into the room, the surprise, to some of those present, could not have been greater. Norton's face turned livid, and he reeled like a drunken man. He tried to speak, but for some seconds he could not utter a sound.

And Abel Winton, had any one glanced at him, was trembling like a leaf, while a cold perspiration stood out upon his forehead in great drops.

"It is my duty," the officer continued, "to warn you to be guarded in what you say, for whatever words you now utter may be turned against you at your trial."

"I am not guilty!" Norton cried, as soon as he could speak at all. "I did not kill that man!"

"We have strong proof against you, sir."

"What is your proof?"

"Does this belong to you?" and the officer held up the watch-charm which Blue-Grass Burt had found.

"No, it does not."

"Do you know whom it does belong to, then?"

"Yes, I do."

"Whose is it?"

"It belongs to the murderer, and was lost by him at the place of the crime. It belongs to Abel Winton, and he is the murderer."

With a wild scream, Ettie Winton sprang to her feet, and then fell forward upon her face on the floor.

As for Blue-Grass Burt, he was almost struck dumb.

Could it be, he thought, that Abel Winton, the father of the girl he loved so dearly, was a murderer? And he—he was duty bound to order his arrest; and not only that, but he was sworn to vengeance. He had sworn to hunt down the slayer of his friend, and bring him to justice.

This, then, was the secret Ettie had learned,

and this was the reason she had refused to marry him.

Little wonder the detective hesitated for a moment, as he did before he signaled his men to place Abel under arrest.

"Does this charm belong to you?" the officer asked, addressing the accused man.

"Yes," Abel answered, with head bowed down, "it is mine."

"And where did you lose it?"

"At the place where Norton says."

"Where the body was found?"

"Yes."

"Then you, also, are my prisoner."

The officer had only shown the charm, it will be noticed. The chain itself he kept out of sight, in order that Norton might not suspect the detective. He would guess where he had lost it, no doubt, and would at once conclude that Burt had picked it up.

As the officer placed him under arrest, Abel Winton started violently.

"I am innocent of this crime," he cried; "as innocent as a child unborn. If you arrest me, though, circumstantial evidence will hang me as sure as fate; but, hang me you never shall!" And ere any one could divine his purpose, he drew his knife and plunged it into his own breast.

Most fortunate it was that a doctor was so near at hand.

Springing instantly forward, Alphonso St. Eric caught the man before he could fall; and with the help of one of the officers, carried him out into the hall and laid him down on the oil-cloth covered floor.

The others came pouring out of the little parlor, except the officer who held Morris Norton, now handcuffed, and Ettie Winton, who was lying prone upon the floor.

The young doctor was perfectly cool and self-possessed, and taking off his coat, he prepared to attend to Abel with his best skill.

Before doing so, though, he reminded Mrs. Nelson of Ettie, to whom Blue-Grass Burt was just returning, and they together lifted her up tenderly and laid her upon the sofa, and set about restoring her to consciousness.

As soon as he had removed his coat and pulled up his sleeve, Alphonso knelt beside the self-wounded man and drew out the knife.

For a moment the blood poured forth in a stream, but it soon stopped, and then an examination of the wound was made.

"Is it fatal?" asked the chief officer.

"No," Alphonso answered, "it is not fatal. It is quite deep, but the knife did not touch any vital part."

"And can we remove the man from here, after you have dressed the wound?"

"Yes, I think you may safely do so, if he can lie down."

"I will arrange it so that he can."

Abel Winton was unconscious, and the officer, returning to Morris Norton, questioned him concerning his proof of the charge he had made.

Norton told the story as it is known to the reader, and the officer recognized that the evidence against Winton was strong indeed.

While Norton was telling his story, Ettie Winton came to.

"Oh! Walter," she cried, finding her lover kneeling beside her, "why did you not let me die? I have nothing to live for now."

"Do not say that, my darling," Burt returned, pressing a kiss upon her brow. "Remember the words of the good dominie; 'all may yet be well.'"

"Oh! I hope so, I hope so. For, Walter, as Heaven hears me, I do not believe my father guilty of that crime."

"And that, then, was your secret?"

"Yes. It was revealed to me last night, to induce me to marry Morris Norton. He held proof which connected my father with the crime, and threatened to expose him if I would not become his wife. So strong is my belief that my father is innocent though, I refused, and bade Norton do his worst. My words gave my father courage, and he, too, defied the villain. How it is that he came again under his power, I cannot imagine. Now you know why I refused to become your wife. I could not tell my father's secret, nor would I allow you to share my shame."

It was a noble sentiment, and Blue-Grass Burt felt like a guilty criminal. He loved this fair girl, and that she loved him need not be repeated; and yet, should the proof against her father be strong, he was duty-bound to press the charge with all his power.

And not only was he to duty bound, as we have said before, but he was to vengeance sworn.

He was handling a two-edged sword, which was bound to cut, no matter how it was handled.

The same sentiment—or nearly the same—that had a few minutes before caused this noble girl to refuse to marry him, now bound him to release her—perhaps forever.

He might, perhaps, yet be the means of bringing Abel Winton to the gallows; and then, instead of loving, Ettie would despise and hate him.

Nor could he mention his resolve to her. She,

so pure and sensitive, would believe that he desired to be released from her—her the daughter of a man accused of murder, in order to share no portion of her sorrow and shame. She would believe that he did not truly love her.

No, he could only remain silent, and, if Abel Winton should prove to be guilty, release the girl from her promise as soon as he made himself known in public.

As for withdrawing from the solemn oath he had taken—never! If his own father were found guilty of the crime, he would press the charge upon him just the same. He had taken his oath, and that oath must and should be kept. He was to duty bound—to vengeance sworn.

"Ettie, noble girl that you are," he said, "may God bless you. If your father is innocent, as you so earnestly believe, all heaven and earth shall be moved to prove him so, and to fix the crime where it belongs. If he is guilty—But, my God! that cannot—must not be! And yet—Oh! heavens, spare me."

"What are you saying?" Ettie asked.

"I was saying that we must prove your father innocent, if we have to move all heaven and earth to do it."

"God bless you for your words. And you promise to help me find proof that he is innocent?"

"Yes, I promise you that. If he is innocent, the proof of his innocence shall be made as clear as the light of day."

At that instant Abel Winton regained his consciousness.

"My God!" he cried, "am I still alive? Did I not succeed, then?"

"My father!" cried Ettie, springing up: "what has happened to him?" And ere the detective could prevent, she dashed out into the hall where Abel lay.

"Oh! my father, my father!" she screamed, throwing herself down upon her knees beside him; "what have you done? Oh! what have you done?"

"I have tried to take my life, Ettie, my child, to save you the shame of having it said of you that your father was hanged for murder."

"Hanged for murder! Oh! my God, my God! And I am innocent—oh! I swear that I am innocent of that crime!"

"And you must live to prove that you are innocent."

"Oh! the evidence against me is most damning. I fear that I am doomed."

"No matter how dark the clouds are, father, I believe you innocent, and you must live. None but a coward would seek escape in death."

"Ha!" Abel cried, a new light now flashing in his eyes, "again you call me coward. Tell me, did you not come here to marry Walter Prince to-day?"

"No; I came here to recall my promise to him. Do you suppose that I could wed him with such a shadow upon me? Never!"

"How blind I have been," Abel exclaimed; "and what a fool! You are right. Live I will, until this awful mystery is cleared up, and my innocence is proven."

Blue-Grass Burt saw, heard, and believed; and he resolved to know the truth of the matter, cost what it might.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE EXAMINATION.

As soon as the excitement was over, and Dr. St. Eric had fully decided that it was perfectly safe to remove Abel Winton to town, the officers set out with their prisoners.

When they reached town, Norton was given a cell in the jail, and Abel Winton, under guard, was put into a room in the jailer's house.

Such an excitement in their usually quiet house had given quite a shock to Kate Nelson, but the young doctor decided that it was not serious.

He, the doctor, and the old minister, soon took their leave, and an hour later Farmer Nelson got out his team and drove the artist-detective and Ettie Winton back to town.

Burt saw Ettie home, and after a few words of hope and consolation to her and Jane Winton, he went to the hotel.

The excitement in the town was intense, the citizens having suddenly awoke to the fact that the revenue detectives were not so much asleep as the *Weekly News* had tried to make them believe.

To find Abel Winton charged with the crime, was a surprise to one and all. He, an easy-going, law-abiding citizen; he was almost the last person that would have been suspected by his fellow townsmen.

Of the two, they would sooner believe Norton the guilty one; yet even, he had been above suspicion.

That evening Blue-Grass Burt paid a visit to Abel Winton, and heard his story in full.

He saw at once that the circumstantial evidence was, as Abel had himself declared, most damning, and there was a grave doubt in his mind, after he had heard the wonderful—almost improbable—story.

All around town, too, were to be heard remarks that Abel Winton had never been him-

self since the day of the crime. Many little things, of little or no importance before, were now called to mind and given a frightful significance.

Truly, Abel Winton was in a dangerous position.

The *Weekly News*, which issued on the day following the arrest, contained a hasty editorial in which it admonished the people not to be too hasty in their judgment of the men arrested. "Remember," the article concluded, "that every man is to be held innocent until he is proven guilty."

Two days later, as soon as it was considered safe to carry Abel Winton to the court-room, the justice of the town held the examination.

The charge against Morris Norton was considered first.

The witnesses were the chief of the revenue officers and one of his men.

They exhibited the watch-charm, with the broken links attached, which, as they explained, had been found near the scene of the crime.

They explained that they had been constantly watching for the chain to which the charm belonged, and learning at last that it was in the possession of Morris Norton, they supposed it was his, and arrested him on suspicion.

They declined to say how they had learned the chain was in Norton's possession, but as Norton himself willingly acknowledged the fact, the point was not important.

Morris Norton, then, told how the chain had been found by him. He explained satisfactorily where he had been on the night previous to the finding of the body; how he came to be returning to town that stormy morning; and what had caused him to turn aside from the path to the spot where the murdered man was found. A snake had crossed the path just in front of him, he said, and in running after it, it led him to where the body lay.

He started, then, to tell about the sudden coming of Abel Winton, but he was stopped.

It was his own case, the justice reminded him, and not the case of Abel Winton, that was then under consideration.

The justice then demanded the chain to be produced.

Norton had to confess that he had lost it.

"Is this the one?" asked the chief of the officers, holding it up.

"Yes, it is," Norton answered. "How came it in your possession?"

"That, sir, I decline to answer. We do not disclose our methods."

The officer handed the chain to the justice, who compared it with the links attached to the charm.

He recognized the chain at once, as in fact he had recognized the charm; but of course he made no personal comments.

"Abel Winton," he asked, "do you recognize this chain and this charm?"

"Yes," Abel responded, "I do."

"Are they yours?"

"They are."

"That is all."

Turning to the witnesses, then, the justice inquired:

"Have you any further proof against this man?"

"No," replied the chief; "we have no further proof."

"Such being the case, the prisoner is discharged."

Then came the case of Abel Winton.

Morris Norton was the first witness called, and taking up his story at the point where the justice had stopped him, he went on. He was, he said, surprised and frightened at his horrible discovery. He hardly knew what to do. While he stood there undecided, he happened to catch sight of the chain, and picking it up, recognized it at once as the property of Abel Winton.

"Barely had I picked the chain up," he continued, "when I heard a sound behind me, and glancing around, I beheld, to my surprise, Abel Winton himself."

"My God!" he cried, turning pale instantly; "Morris Norton, you here?"

"Yes, Abel Winton, murderer," I answered, "I am here!"

"Why," the justice demanded, "have you kept this a secret?"

"I will tell you candidly," Norton answered. "I love Abel Winton's daughter. Previously, I had no hopes of winning her. Learning this secret, I resolved to force Abel Winton to my terms. He agreed to them. To buy my silence, he promised to give me his daughter in marriage."

"Abel Winton, is this true?"

"It is."

This evidence alone was enough to hang him.

"Have you anything more to tell?"—this to Norton.

"No; that is all. The facts are told."

At this moment the public prosecutor, who had been given an idea what the evidence would be, rose up and said:

"I demand that Morris Norton be arrested and held for trial as an accessory after the fact. He is guilty of aiding and abetting the accused in the concealing of facts."

This was a surprise to all, and it was some-

thing Norton had not counted on. He turned pale, and trembled not a little.

"I agree with you," the justice coincided. "Morris Norton, you are held, as an accessory, to await the action of the grand jury."

Norton sunk back in his chair.

Abel Winton was then called, and he was assisted to the chair.

"Are you guilty, or not guilty, of the charge against you?" the justice asked.

"Not guilty," Abel replied.

"How, then, came your watch-chain to be found near the body of the murdered man, and broken? Tell us your story."

Abel did so. He told how, on the morning of March 4th, as he was returning to town from Brown's farm, by way of the by-path across the hill, he heard a groan. He listened, and heard it again. Making his way through the bushes, he came upon Charles Carnsworth, as the man was then known to him, lying senseless on the ground, with a knife buried to the hilt in his back. He acted upon the first impulse of the moment, sprung forward and drew the knife out, and then tried to stop the flow of blood.

"Just then," to quote the prisoner's words direct, "the man began to come to, and in a moment he sprung to his feet, crying:

"'Hal murderer, we will die together!' And then he sprung upon me, and I had to fight hard to save my life.

"Loss of blood soon weakened him, though, and he fell to the ground. Then I told him that I was not his slayer, but that, hearing him groan, I had come to see what it was. He then recognized me and believed me. I asked him to tell me who had dealt him the cowardly blow, but he did not know. He said he did not see him. He was walking along the path, he said, when suddenly he heard a step behind him, and the next instant he was knocked senseless.

"He was about to tell me more, but with a sudden gasp he died.

"Then the horror of my situation came upon me. What if I were found there, all covered with blood, and the murdered man lying at my feet. I would be accused of killing him, and no power on earth could save me from being hanged. Excited and frightened, I dashed away through the woods like a madman. I remained in the woods all day, trying to think of some way to destroy the blood-stained clothes I wore. No plan could I think of. When night came, I started for home, and before I was out of the woods I stumbled upon a polecat. It was the most fortunate thing, I thought, that could have happened. I would be obliged to burn or bury my clothes before I could enter my house.

"Waiting until a late hour, I went home. Calling my wife, I explained my sad plight, and she threw me a change of clothes from the window. Then I went to the barn to make the change. Then, after taking everything out of the pockets, I took my blood-stained clothes—hat, boots and all—and burned them.

"Next morning I missed my watch-chain. Where could it be? Had I lost it in my flight through the woods, or was it near the scene of the crime? From that hour I knew no peace of mind. I, an innocent man, yet as much in danger as though a murderer in fact."

"I set out several times to go to the scene of the crime to look for my chain, but the fear of being seen there always turned me back, and thus week after week passed away. At last I could stand it no longer, and on that stormy morning, when I thought it least likely that any one would be abroad, I decided to go—and went, there to meet Morris Norton.

"He had already found my chain, and held me in his power. He has held me in his power ever since. I told him my story, and he said he believed me; but, having me in his power, he made me promise to give him my daughter's hand in marriage; failing in which, he would expose my secret.

"That is all; and, as God hears me, it is the truth."

For full a minute not a sound was heard.

A stranger story had never been told.

But one thing was lacking to make the chain complete, and that was—the motive.

Presently the justice spoke.

"Abel Winton," he said, "I am bound to commit you to jail, charged with the murder of Amos Norman, to be tried before the grand jury next month.

"Constable, conduct the prisoners hence."

Morris Norton was led away at once, while Abel Winton was carried back to his room in the jailer's house, and so ended the examination.

Two weeks slipped by.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

COLONEL CASS CURED.

"DOCTOR, I'm sick. Oh! I'm so sick."

The speaker was Colonel Emmerly Cass.

He entered the office of Alphonso St. Eric at his usual hour one morning, the hour he usually called for his morning drink—and the doctor's mail, and dropping onto a chair, uttered the words we quote.

And his appearance went to prove that sick he was.

He was pale, his face was haggard, and he was trembling.

"Sick, my deah, colonel!" the young doctor exclaimed; "what is the—aw—the trouble?"

"Oh! I don't know, doctor, I don't know; but I'm sick—oh! so sick."

"Well, but—aw—my deah colonel, what are your symptoms?"

"Oh! I don't know, I don't know. All I can tell ye is—I'm sick."

"How is your appetite?"

"Bad, bad. It has gone back on me entirely."

"No appetite! this may be serious. My deah colonel, let me see your tongue."

The colonel did so.

"And let me feel your pulse."

Again the colonel complied.

"My deah colonel, I fear you are going to have a—aw—a fit of illness, weally. You are vewy much out of order."

"I knew it, doctor, I knew it."

"How did you know it?"

"Because, of late I've been goin' back on my liquor—or it has been goin' back on me; and when a Kentuckian can't stomach his whisky, doctor, I kin tell ye there's somethin' wrong."

"You're losing your appetite for dwink, my deah colonel?"

"Exactly."

"Colonel, I fear this is serious."

"Serious! well, I reckon it is serious! doctor, I'm afraid I'm goin' to die. I've been sick before, doctor; but I was never so sick before that I couldn't stomach my liquor."

"And when did you first feel these symptoms?"

"Oh! it's been a-comin' on me for days. I felt it a week ago."

"And said nothing to me! colonel, you did wrong, vewy wrong."

"Yes, I know I did, I feel it in my bones. It's all up with th' colonel, doctor, I'm sure of it. If Priscilla had only relented— But, it's too late now. Her poor old dad won't trouble her any more, and Stonewall Jackson kin be shot. Oh! doctor, it is hard to die."

"Talk not about dying, my deah colonel, don't! I'll give you a little medicine, and I guess you will come out all wight, if I can ward off the—aw—the pwesent bad symptoms."

"Here, my deah colonel, take this." And dropping a powder into a little water, he handed it to him.

"Heavens!" the colonel gasped, "do you want to kill me outright?"

"Kill you outright! What do you mean?"

"Ain't this water you're givin' me?"

"Yes; water with medicine in it."

"Well, don't ye know that I haven't tasted water fer years? I don't intend to go back to it now, I kin tell ye!"

"Pardon me; I did not think. I will prepare the same in a little whisky." And throwing out the mixture, the young doctor proceeded to do so.

"There!" he presently said, "now take this."

The colonel took it.

"There, that's it; now you can come up again this afternoon and let me know how you are."

"All right, if I'm alive I will. Any letters to post?"

"No, none to-day. Do you—aw—want your wegular dwink?"

"No, not this mornin'. I guess I'll let it skip till I feel better."

It was the first time the colonel had ever refused a drink in his life.

He went away, and the young doctor smiled to see how well his treatment was working.

About an hour later a boy came to the doctor's office in great haste, and asked him to come at once to the hotel.

"Who is sick?" the doctor inquired.

"Old man Cass," the boy replied. "They're afraid he's goin' ter die."

Alphonso knew that the climax was reached, and ordering his colored man to get out the horse and wagon and follow him to the hotel, he went with the boy.

He found the colonel in the bar-room, completely prostrated.

"Oh, doctor, it's all up wi' me," the colonel gasped; "it's all up. I'm goin' ter die, doctor."

"Never give up!" the doctor exclaimed, encouragingly. "While there's life there's hope, you know, my deah colonel; so—aw—so never give up."

"That's all very well, Doc," the poor colonel moaned, "but you don't know how sick I am."

The doctor's wagon was soon at hand, and the colonel, too weak to protest, was lifted into it and taken across the hill to his daughter's place.

Alphonso went down the lane in advance, and, first ascertaining that Stonewall Jackson was secured, entered the yard and found Priscilla.

She was glad to see him, as she always was, and after they had exchanged a few pleasant words, Alphonso stated his business.

"My poor father here, sick!" Priscilla cried. "Oh! I hope it is not serious."

"It is the effect of my treatment," Alphonso assured. "There is no danger, but for a day or two he will be a vewy sick man. He will, weally."

"And you feel sure of success?"

"Oh! I am positively certain. He has taken

his medicine so vewy wegular, don't ye know; he has, I assure you. He hasn't missed a single dose until to-day."

Priscilla had a room all ready, and calling her hired man, he and the doctor's man carried the colonel up and put him in bed.

For several days the colonel was a very sick man, and then he began to recover rapidly.

And as his strength returned, returned also his craving for strong drink.

"Oh! for a taste—one single taste!" he would cry out. "Oh! Priscilla, how can you see me suffer thus?"

Priscilla could bear it very comfortably, it seemed, for she stoically refused to "relent."

The colonel sat up one day, walked out the next, felt very good the next day, and was so well on the day following that he resolved to go to town.

He could stand it no longer. His thirst was too great.

"Oh, if I only had a little money," he muttered, "I would be happy. It's no use, though. Priscilla won't relent, and there's no use askin' her any more. I'll get back to town and carry the doctor's mail again. That's my only hope now. Oh, if Braddsbury had twenty-four mails a day how happy I would be!"

He had already set out for town, and as he muttered as above he ran his fingers into his every pocket, in the hopes of finding a stray dime.

Suddenly he touched something that sent a thrill to his very toes. It felt like money.

With nervous haste he drew it forth, and money, it proved to be. It was a two-dollar bill.

This money had been put into the colonel's pocket by Alphonso St. Eric. The young doctor knew that he would crave for drink, and in order to make the cure complete he must have it; and knowing, too, that Priscilla would give him neither drink nor money, he took this course to supply the want.

"What!" the colonel ejaculated, surprised beyond degree, "do my eyes not deceive me? No, it is money! Ah! ye gods! what a feast I'll have! At last—at last Priscilla has relented. May Heaven bless her, and may she continue to relent. Now the future looks bright, indeed!"

When he reached town he made his way at once to the Open Door Hotel.

Arriving there, he entered the bar-room and sunk down upon a chair, tired out.

The landlord grasped him by the hand at once and congratulated him heartily, and there were others present who did the same.

"A drink! a drink!" the colonel gasped. "I'm dying for a drink!" and he displayed his money.

The landlord hastened to serve him.

"Come, boys," the colonel invited; "it's my treat. Step up and name your desires."

Up rose the stalwart citizens, clearing their mouths for action, and took positions at the bar.

"Yes," the colonel continued, "it's my treat. I'm happy to tell ye, gentlemen, that at last—at last my daughter has relented. Once again th' lurid light burns high within my old heart, and I'm happy."

"Good for her!" exclaimed Tom, the landlord. "Shows her heart is in the right place, colonel."

"Yes, and I hope it'll stay there."

The liquor was poured out, and the landlord carrying the colonel's glass around to where he sat, all prepared to drink.

"Well, colonel, your health," said those at the bar, as they crooked their elbows.

"And yours," the colonel responded, raising his glass.

And then they drank.

That is to say, those at the bar did; the colonel did not.

"Pssh!" he spluttered, the instant the liquor entered his mouth, and out it flew. "Ughh!" with a shiver; "what in the name of everlastin' d'ye call this?" he demanded. "Is it kerosene, hair-oil, goose-grease, castor-oil, or what?" and he set down his glass with a bang, still continuing to spit and splutter.

The landlord and the others looked on in blank amazement. This was something they had never expected to behold.

"What does it mean?" the colonel demanded.

"Are you playin' a trick on me?"

"No, of course not," the landlord assured.

"What do you mean? What is th' matter?"

"What is th' matter? Why, this stuff ain't fit ter drink!—that's what's the matter."

"Why, I don't see how that kin be, colonel; it's all outen th' same bottle. Do you find anythin' wrong with it?" turning to the others.

"Not a thing," they answered.

"Then there must 'a' been somethin' in my glass," the colonel asserted. "Give me a clean one."

"I'm sure there wasn't," the landlord averred, "but here is a clean one. Try it again."

And the colonel did. But the result was even worse than before. The vile taste almost made him vomit.

"Ugh!" he cried, "take it away." And he arose at once and went direct to see the doctor.

"Doctor," he cried, the moment he entered,

"give me a dose of cold p'ison. Life ain't worth th' livin' any longer."

"Ah! my dear colonel," Alphonso exclaimed, "I'm glad to see you around again. But, what is the trouble?"

"Th' trouble is that I'm a doomed man, a shattered wreck. My hopes are all blasted."

"But, my dear colonel, what is it? Come, explain."

"It is just this: I can't take any liquor. It goes ag'in' me."

"Nonsense! I never heard of such a thing. Here, now, try a little of this." And the young doctor set out a bottle and glass most temptingly.

The poor colonel's mouth fairly watered. Pouring out a little, with trembling hands, he raised the glass to his lips.

The result was worse than ever. He had barely time to reach the window when he vomited in a way that threatened to turn his stomach inside out.

Alphonso pretended the greatest surprise imaginable.

Giving the colonel a little medicine to quiet his stomach and nerves, he advised him to lie down for a time.

But the colonel refused to do so. He resolved to go back home, and started.

There was a thirst within that seemed to be burning him up, but it was not a thirst for rum. The very thought of the once tempting glass now caused him to gag.

Making his way slowly up the hill, he found he would have to stop and rest ere he could gain the top. He was near the hillside spring, and turning in there, he sat down upon the grass.

In a moment the sight of the sparkling water attracted his eye, and acting on a sudden impulse, he got down and took a drink.

"Ah!" he gasped, after drinking long and heartily, "that hits th' spot. Th' fire is out."

The fire was out indeed.

Throwing himself back upon the grass, he slept soundly for several hours.

When he awoke he took another hearty drink from the spring, and then went home—a new man.

Colonel Emmerly Cass was saved.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A RAY OF HOPE.

BLUE-GRASS BURT, in the mean time, had not been idle, although the five revenue officers had settled down to their usual state at the hotel, as though everything was done.

But it did not do, as the citizens had already found, to trust all to appearances.

There was now an air of mystery about these officers, and no one knew when to expect another move.

As we have shown, these officers were under the authority of the Gold Star Detective, and it is safe to say that he knew what was being done if no one else did.

One day, in disguise, Burt paid a visit to the farm of Miss Priscilla Cass.

There he inquired for Beriah Simms, her hired man, and learning that he was at work in a field, went out to see him.

"Your name is Simms, I believe," he said; "Beriah Simms."

"Yes, sir," Mr. Simms admitted.

"Well, Mr. Simms"—displaying his badge—"I am a detective. I have called here to ask you where you were on the fourth day of last March."

Beriah Simms turned pale.

"I—I—I—" he gasped, and got no further.

"Mind, now," the detective cautioned, "you had better tell the truth. I can look right through you, and can almost read your very thoughts."

"I—I don't remember where I was, sir," Beriah faltered.

"There—there, now," said Burt, "that won't do. Is that your coat over there on the fence?"

"Yes, sir," Beriah answered.

"Please bring it here a moment."

The man obeyed, and Burt took the garment and examined it.

"I see you have lost a button, Mr. Simms," he remarked.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know where you lost it?"

"No, sir."

Burt took from his pocket the button he had found.

It matched those on the coat exactly.

"This looks very much like the lost button, Mr. Simms."

"Y-yes, sir."

"Now, Mr. Simms, do you know where I found it?"

"N-no, sir," the man declared, as he wiped the cold perspiration from his face.

"Well," said Burt, "I will tell you. I found it where the body of that murdered man was found several weeks ago. Mr. Simms, it looks very bad for you, and I hope you can explain how it came there. If not—"

But Mr. Simms was upon his knees at the detective's feet, begging to be spared.

He was the very picture of abject terror.

"Are you guilty of murder?" the detective demanded sternly.

"N-no!" the man almost screamed. "I didn't kill him; I didn't, I didn't!"

"Then how came this button of yours there? Come, Mr. Simms, you had better speak out, for you are in danger of being hanged."

"Y-yes, sir, I will tell you all—everything."

"Do so, then, and at once."

Beriah Simms then told a story that was but little less strange than the one told by Abel Winton.

Blue-Grass Burt listened in surprise.

"And your wife was with you, you say?" he queried, when the man concluded.

"Yes, sir, she was with me."

"And she has that paper now?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then she must deliver it to me at once."

"All right. Come wi' me to th' house, sir, an' I'll gi' it to ye."

Burt went with the man to the house, and Jane Ann Simms corroborated everything her husband had told.

"And the paper," Burt reminded, "where is that?"

"I will git it, sir, in jest a minute," the woman answered. And going into the house, she soon returned with a scrap of paper in her hand.

"Heavens!" Burt cried, as he read it, "do you not know what this is?"

"No," they answered, "we can't read writin'."

"Then why in the name of Heaven did you not get some one to read it for you?"

"We were afraid o' gittin' inter trouble," the man replied.

"Verily, ignorance is a crime!" the detective exclaimed in disgust. "Here, had I not discovered this button, you would have concealed that which will aid in saving an innocent man from death on the gallows."

"Lor! be that so?"

"Yes, it is so. And now listen: You are in no danger, but you will both be called to court to tell the story you have just told me, and you must not fail to be there. If you do, it will be the worse for you. And in the meanwhile, do not say a word about this to any one. Do you understand?"

"Yes," they answered, "we understands."

"And you won't fail?"

"No, we won't fail. We'll tell the same story then as we've told now, if you're sure there's no danger."

"There's no danger, if you do not fail to be here and tell the truth. If you do fail, though—well, the crime may fall upon you, and both of you will be hanged."

What Burt had discovered remains to be explained.

On the following day Walter Prince called at the home of the Wintons.

He was welcomed heartily, as usual, and it was soon discovered that he was quite cheerful.

Had he learned something favorable? or was he merely trying to cheer their despairing hearts?

He soon set them right.

"Ettie, darling," he presently said, "and you, Mrs. Winton, I have good news for you."

"Good news for us?" they cried. "Oh! tell us what it is!"

"You must first promise that you will not mention it."

"Oh! we promise, we promise!"

"Well, it is this: I believe the detectives have found proof that Abel Winton is innocent, and that they are now upon the right track."

"Oh! God be praised if this be true!" Ettie exclaimed in reverent tones, while Jane buried her face in her hands, weeping tears of joy.

"But how do you know this?" Ettie presently inquired.

"I have been talking with the officers in confidence," the detective replied, "and I am sure there are now strong hopes that all will be well."

"Oh! this is good news—good news!"

"Mind, though," Burt cautioned, "you are not to mention it—not to any one."

"Oh! we will not mention it, be sure of that."

"No knowing what mischief it might occasion if you did."

"It shall not be mentioned. It shall not even be whispered between us."

"And now," Burt went on to say, "I must inform you that I am going away."

"Going away!" Ettie gasped, her fair face blanching at the thought.

"Yes," Burt repeated, "I am going away. But not for good, my little love," he hastened to add. "I shall be gone for some days, and it is possible that you will not see me again until the day of your father's trial. You must be brave, meanwhile, and hope for the best."

"You, then, expect to be present at the trial?"

"Yes; I may be called as a witness."

"Called as a witness—you?"

"Yes. But I can explain nothing now. Pray do not mention a word of what I have said."

"No," they both again assured him, "not a word shall be mentioned."

A short time later the detective took his leave, and two hearts in that household beat lighter than they had in many days.

Early next morning Walter Prince settled his bill at the hotel, bade adieu to the friends he had made in Braddsbury, and, with his artist's outfit upon his back, took his departure from the town.

Few people there ever expected to see him again.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

RAIDING THE MOONSHINERS.

ONE morning a few days later the news flew through the town that Morris Norton had escaped from jail.

The jailer stoutly insisted that the man was in his cell when he closed the jail for the night, at nine o'clock, but when he opened it at six o'clock he was gone.

The cell was locked; not a bar was bent or broken; the outer door was secured, and how the escape had been effected no one could imagine.

The five revenue officers, too, were gone from town.

Had the good people of Braddsbury taken these two facts together they might have guessed that there was some connection between them.

No one except those in the secret, though, knew or surmised aught of the truth.

Duplicate keys had been made and conveyed to the prisoner secretly, together with a note signed "Friend," telling him to make his escape; and these steps had been taken by none other than Blue-Grass Burt.

The following night was dark and stormy. Black clouds had been rolling up all the afternoon, and as night came on, the very heavens seemed to open and pour out an ocean of water upon the earth. Lightning flashed, thunder rolled, and the wind swept across the hills and down upon the town with fury.

A dismal night it was to be abroad, yet not a few men were out upon the hills.

And these men made their way to the cabin, of Ebenezer Crowblack, the old negro who guarded the moonshiners' retreat.

Singly and in pairs they arrived there, and knocked at the door.

"Well, who'm dar?" the old darky would call out.

"Hurry up and open this door," the answer would be, "or you'll find out who we are!"

"I wants ter know who'm dar 'fore I opens dis yere do."

"Say, you old fool, I'll kick your door down if you don't open it quick!"

"Kick erlong, den, ef yer wants ter, but you don't git in yere till I knows ye, dat's shua!"

"Ebenezer, don't you know me? I'm — —," giving a name, which was always whispered through the hole in the door.

"Yes, I knows you, but I wants de pass-word 'fore you kin come in heur."

Then would be whispered the word "whiskey."

These sentences, with some variations, but always beginning with the same letters—"W-H-I-S-K-E-Y"—were used each time; and in themselves they formed the pass-word—"whiskey."

The pass-word spoken, the door would open, and one after another, as they arrived, the men would gain admittance to the place.

The last man to arrive was Captain Moonshine.

The old darky gave him a candle and raised the trap in the floor for him, and he disappeared.

In a few minutes he had passed the second door and entered the cave, where the illicit whisky-still was running as when we saw it last.

Here the captain was greeted most heartily.

"Are you all here?" he demanded.

"Yes," was the response, "all here."

"Good. I have something to say to you. I suppose you expected me here to-night."

"Yes, we did; and heur we be to do whatever you say."

"Well, it is not much. I intend to go away from here for a time, and want you to take full charge of this business and run it with the utmost care."

"All right, cap'n, you kin trust us for that."

"Yes, I know it."

"And we won't 'low no sharp-noses around, either."

No one beheld the six men who were creeping forward from the deep shadows of the cave.

These men were—Blue-Grass Burt and his officers.

Each one had his badge displayed and each held a trusty revolver in hand.

Blue-Grass Burt had worked hard and incessantly and at last had won the day.

He had discovered that Morris Norton and "Captain Moonshine" were one and the same. He had discovered the place where grain was carried into the cave and the whisky taken out. He had also succeeded in learning the name and residence of every man belonging to the band. Several, like Norton, were wealthy farmers of the neighborhood.

These facts learned, the next step was to make the arrest; and to prove that Norton and "Captain Moonshine" were one and the same, it was necessary to arrest him with his band around him.

This led to Norton's being released from jail; and that night, feeling sure that the villain would visit the retreat, Burt ordered his men to be at the rear entrance to the cave, there to await his coming.

One man was detailed to watch the cabin, in order that it could be known when all had entered.

Burt, of course, shadowed Norton. Not for a moment scarcely, after his "escape" from jail, did the detective lose sight of him.

Norton, or "Captain Moonshine," as we have shown, was the last to enter the cabin, and when he entered, the man on guard hastened to the other entrance to report.

Blue-Grass Burt was not far behind him, and as soon as he arrived he led the way into the cave.

"No," Norton said, in response to the last remark of his foreman, who it was had spoken; "allow no detectives around. Curse them! they are 'sharp-noses,' sure enough. I'm getting actually afraid of them."

"And well you need be!" came a strange voice, in stentorian tones.

Every man looked around instantly, to meet the stern faces and flashing eyes of Blue-Grass Burt and his men, and to find themselves covered by six gleaming revolvers.

"Hands up!" Burt cried, "or you die in your tracks!"

It was a surprise complete; and, resistance being useless, the moonshiners surrendered.

In less than a minute handcuffs were on them all.

Blue-Grass Burt was disguised the same as when he had met Morris Norton to take back his gold star badge, and Norton recognized him at once. He had the same "rummy" nose and the same mole on his cheek. And there upon his breast blazed the star of gold!

"Morris Norton," he said, "we meet once more."

"Yes, curse you!" Norton cried, "and we may meet yet again."

"I have no doubt we shall."

"I mean that we will meet again to your sorrow."

"Oh! I have no fear of that!"

Sending two of his men to arrest the old dorky, they soon returned with him, the old fellow being frightened almost out of his senses.

The arrest being accomplished, the prisoners were searched and disarmed, and then, with the exception of Norton, they were taken to town under guard of four of the officers.

Norton was held at the cave.

When the officers entered town with their prisoners, the astonishment of the citizens knew no bounds.

Verily, they knew but little of the ways of these mysterious men of the Secret Service.

The justice of the peace was brought to his office, an immediate examination was held, and the prisoners were committed to jail in due form.

Nor did the four officers trust to the jailer alone to hold them.

They remained on guard themselves.

The end was now near at hand. In a few days more court would be held at Braddsbury, and these prisoners, like Abel Winton, would be tried.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A FORCED CONFESSION.

SHORTLY after the four revenue officers started from the moonshiners' cave with their prisoners, Blue-Grass Burt and the remaining officer conducted Morris Norton up to the old dorky's cabin, where they proceeded to make themselves comfortable until the storm should abate.

They had an important task in hand, and perhaps would have to remain at the old cabin for two or three days before they could accomplish it.

In the cave there was nothing necessary to be watched, and the cabin being by far the better place, to the cabin they had resolved to go.

Morris Norton, stubbornly silent, could but wonder at this strange proceeding.

Why was he detained here, when the others were taken to jail? Why had he not been taken there, too? At last he could no longer resist asking questions.

"What are you going to stay here for?" he asked, when he finally found that such was the detective's intention.

"I intend to stay here, Morris Norton," was the cool reply, "until you make a full confession of your crime."

"What crime?" the villain cried, his face turning ghastly white.

"The murder of Detective Amos Norman."

It will be remembered that we have said that "Captain Moonshine" was the murderer; and now that we have explained that Morris Norton and "Captain Moonshine" were one and the same, the secret is out.

But Blue-Grass Burt had been unable to fix the crime upon him positively, and as the day of the trial was near, he meant to force him to confess.

He could have brought the crime home to him finally, but he was now forced to work against

time, and a confession would greatly accelerate matters.

The villain forced a laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha! you will stay here forever, then."

"Very well. I can stand it as long as you can."

"And it's the same with me."

"We'll see about that. By the way, is there any liquor here in the cabin?"

"Look and find out," was the surly reply.

"Oh! well, we can do that. I intended to give you some, too, though."

"Well, there's plenty of it just down cellar."

"Thank you. I'll go down and get some. Joe," to the officer, "keep your eye on our man."

"All right," Joe answered; and taking up a candle, Burt opened the trap-door and descended.

Looking around, he soon espied several jugs and bottles.

Selecting three of the latter, he opened one and poured into it a little powder from a small vial. Then shaking the bottle well, he made a mark on it with the diamond in his badge, so that he could not mistake it, and went up to the room.

"Here we are," he exclaimed, handing one bottle to the officer and the other—the marked one—to their prisoner, "and now we'll be happy."

Norton at once pulled the stopper out of his bottle with his teeth, and took a good drink.

"Much obliged to you for that, anyhow," he remarked; "but I guess I'll have to trouble you to pick up the stopper and set the bottle down. My hands don't work freely with these irons on them."

"No, I suppose not," Burt agreed, as he took the bottle, corked it, and set it on the table; "they're very inconvenient, no doubt."

Twenty minutes later Morris Norton was sound asleep.

"So far so good," Burt remarked, as he witnessed with satisfaction the effect of the drug.

"Now, for the storm to abate a little."

An hour afterward the storm suddenly ceased and the clouds began to tear apart, showing the moon behind their dark bodies as they swept along the midnight sky.

"Come!" the detective then exclaimed, "we will go."

Finding two poles of convenient size, they made a stretcher, laid Norton upon it, having first put a small gag into his mouth to prevent his making any outcry when he awoke; then closing the old cabin after them, they carried the sleeping man away through the woods.

When they finally laid the stretcher down, they were at the place where the body of the murdered man had been found.

Here Norton was put in a sitting position against a tree, to which he was securely bound.

Just in front of him, only a few yards away, was the spot where the dead man had lain.

Then the stretcher was taken out of sight.

This done, Blue-Grass Burt put a false beard on the face of his assistant, and he, first spreading out his rubber cape on the ground, laid himself down just where the dead man had been found.

All being prepared, the detective then stepped behind the tree to which Norton was bound, poured a little liquid from a bottle into his hand, and reaching around, held his hand for a moment over the sleeping man's face.

The effect was magical.

Norton gave two or three gasps, and suddenly awoke.

For an instant he gazed stupidly around; then his eyes fell upon the man lying before him.

Instantly his eyes bulged almost from their sockets; great beads of perspiration rolled down his face; his mouth opened, as though he desired to scream; and his whole appearance indicated the greatest mental agony.

It was a terrible—a horrible sight.

Not a sound was to be heard, and the prisoner's eyes were riveted to the scene before him.

One minute—two—three minutes passed; then the horrified man began to struggle to escape. He pulled and tugged at his bonds; the veins in his face swelled almost to bursting; he foamed at the mouth; his eyes rolled, and groan after groan escaped him.

For some minutes this lasted; then, completely exhausted, the wretch fell back and closed his eyes.

But his eyes would not stay shut. Instantly they were wide open again, fixed upon the dread sight.

At a signal from the detective, the officer now uttered a hollow groan and half arose, slowly, to his feet.

Norton renewed his struggle to escape, evidently agonized with fear.

He soon fell back again, his strength spent by his frightful exertions.

The man before him now raised his left arm until his finger pointed straight at the murderer, when, in hollow tones, he said:

"Morris Norton, the end is come. No peace on earth shall you know. Every time you close your eyes in sleep will I haunt you thus, until

you confess the horrible crime of which you are guilty."

Slowly the arm descended, and without a sound the man lay down again.

Norton's fright and agony were pitiable to behold.

Blue-Grass Burt thought it best "to arrest this, lest the man's reason should give way; so pouring another kind of liquid into his palm, he reached around and clapped his hand over the doomed rascal's mouth.

In a moment Norton was again asleep.

Hastily he was released from the tree, put upon the stretcher, and carried back to the cabin, where he was placed on the old dorky's bed.

When he awoke it was long after daylight, and he sprang up with a scream.

The detective and his assistant had been asleep on the floor, but they were now up, and Burt exclaimed:

"Hello! what's the matter?"

"Where am I?" Norton demanded.

He instantly remembered, though, and with a groan he sunk back upon the bed.

All day he ate but little or nothing, and as night came on he began to rave like a madman.

He had a horror of again falling asleep, fearing to have his horrible dream—if dream it was—repeated.

Worse and worse he grew, until at last he began to call for whisky.

Burt put him off until almost dark, and then he gave him his bottle.

Half an hour later he was again asleep.

At midnight, then, was repeated the awful scene of the previous night.

Again Norton awoke, to find himself at the scene of his crime. There, before him, lay the body of Amos Norman.

And this time Blue-Grass Burt almost feared the man would die of fright, so he hastened the work.

Again Norton beheld the murdered man rise up; again his finger was pointed at him; and again he said:

"Morris Norton, the end is come! No peace on earth shall you know! Every time you close your eyes in sleep will I haunt you thus, until you confess the horrible crime of which you are guilty!"

Slowly, then, descended the outstretched arm, but ere the man could lie down again the murderer had fainted.

When he awoke again it was day, and he was still in the old cabin.

He sprang up with a scream, as before, and instantly cried:

"My God! I can stand no more. I am guilty! I confess it. I, and I alone, am the murderer of Amos Norman!"

Blue-Grass Burt was at his side in an instant.

"Will you make a full confession, and sign it?" he demanded.

"Yes—yes! I will confess it all."

Burt sent his man to town at once to bring the public prosecutor and two or three reliable witnesses, and within two hours Morris Norton had made a full confession of his crime, and signed it.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

Now draws our story to its close.

The day for the trial of Abel Winton being so near at hand, Morris Norton's confession was not made public until it was read aloud in open court, when the trial was about to begin.

The surprise can be imagined.

Abel Winton was liberated at once, and was immediately subpoenaed to appear as a witness for the State against the murderer.

It was the greatest day Braddsbury had ever seen, and hundreds of strangers were in town, from miles and miles around.

The most important witness of all was Burton Rosewell, the mysterious detective; and everybody was impatient to hear his name called.

At last their patience was rewarded.

"Burton Rosewell," was called; and the crier repeated the name loudly.

There was a stir in the rear of the room, and, to the amazement of every one present, except his own men, "Walter Prince," the artist, made his way to the stand.

Upon his breast blazed the gold star badge. Morris Norton sprang up in his place with a scream of rage.

"You! you!" he cried. "If I had known this sooner—"

He was forced to sit down.

"Your name?" was asked of the witness.

"Burton Rosewell," came the reply, loud and clear-spoken.

"Your occupation?"

"I am a United States Secret Service detective."

"And you are known as Blue-Grass Burt, the Gold Star Detective?"

"I am."

A wild cheer broke forth, long, loud and ringing; the women present cheering as loudly as the men.

As soon as the court could restore order, the witness told his story.

Never was a narrative listened to with more

rapt attention. Not a sound was to be heard in the room, crowded as it was.

And when he was done, then broke forth another cheer over which the court had no control.

Blue-Grass Burt was the hero of the hour, and to him, as everybody conceded, did Abel Winton owe his life.

And as he left the stand, the first to greet him was Ettie Winton.

Catching her in his arms, caring not who saw, her lover pressed her for an instant to his breast.

The next witnesses were Beriah Simms and his wife.

Their story was this:

On the day of the murder, the fourth of March, they were crossing the hill from the place known as Brown's farm. When they came near the place where the crime had been committed, they heard some one groaning. Going in the direction of the sound, they came to where Amos Norman lay dying. It seemed that what Abel Winton had taken for death, had been only a fainting. The wounded man was conscious, and he asked for a pencil. Mrs. Simms happened to have one. Taking it, the dying man wrote a few words upon a scrap of paper, and handing it to Beriah, said:

"Take this, and do not lose it. It may some day save—save—"

Those were his last words on earth. The blood gushed forth from his mouth and he fell back dead.

Then the same fear that had taken possession of Abel Winton seized them, and they hastened from the scene.

Being unable to read, and afraid to show the paper to any one, the secret it contained might have been lost forever had it not been for the button found by the patient detective.

The scrap of paper read as follows:

"If suspicion of my death falls upon Abel Winton, believe his story as I do. I know not who my murderer is, but I suspect—*Morris Norton*. He is 'Captain Moonshine,' of the band of moonshiners, and he has discovered, I think, that I am a detective on his track. AMOS NORMAN."

And Morris Norton's confession proved that Norman's suspicion had been right. He, finding that Norman was on his track and had learned his secret, resolved to kill him, and had carried out his resolve.

It was one of the greatest trials the courts of that county ever knew.

Morris Norton expiated his crime on the gallows, as the records of the county show, and the oath taken by the Gold Star Detective was fulfilled.

He had done his duty, and had wreaked vengeance upon the slayer of his friend.

All the others of the moonshiners received punishment to the full extent of the law, and their illicit business was broken up.

The very next issue of the *Weekly News*, to the satisfaction of the revenue officers, contained a complete retraction of its former hostile articles, made a humble apology, and extolled the U. S. Secret Service to the highest degree.

Burton Rosewell and Ettie Winton were soon married, and a happier and more loving couple the world never knew.

Married, too, were Alphonso St. Eric and Miss Priscilla Cass.

Finding her father's cure complete, Priscilla called one day at the young doctor's office to pay for the service.

Money could not pay Alphonso's price. He demanded the lady's heart and hand. And Priscilla, true to her promise, gave them willingly.

She soon removed to town to share the doctor's house, and her father took charge of the farm.

From that day to this the old colonel has not tasted liquor, and he is honored and respected by all who know him.

Alphonso has since performed several more cures of a similar kind, and has injured the business of the Open Door Hotel not a little.

Kate Nelson, too, under his care, finally recovered, and has since married a sturdy young farmer.

And Abel Winton—a happier man does not live. His wife, Jane, is as unlike what she was as day is unlike night, and she makes life all sunshine for all who are near her. No word of complaining falls from her lips—much less a word of scolding, and all who know her love her.

Two of her daughters, too, are now married, and the grandchildren are more than can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Among these are Ettie's two little ones, a boy and a girl. The boy is the very likeness of his father, and his name is—Walter Prince. The name of the little girl is Kate.

Burton Rosewell is a citizen of Braddsbury, and is one of the leading men of the county.

He is still in Government employ, and is sometimes called away from home for weeks together, to take hold of some important case, and

never yet has he known the meaning of the word "failure."

In the little cemetery, just out of the town, there is one grave that is always noticeable for the care with which it is kept. Upon it and all around it grow the greenest of grass and the brightest of flowers, and at its head is a neat monument, upon which is inscribed the name of Amos Norman. Below the name and the dates of birth and death, are these words:

"REST, TRUE FRIEND; THOU ART AVENGED."

And it is a pleasure to the citizens to tell the story these words recall to mind, and to explain their meaning by repeating that story as we have told it here.

THE END.

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